Polyhedron®

NEWSZINE

APRIL

82

RPGA NETWORK

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About the Cover

Artist Scott Rosema deftly portrayed a gallant fighter wearing a *cloak of weather* and brandishing a *sword of lightning*, magic items detailed inside this issue.

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Polyhedron® NEWSZINE

Volume 14, Number 4
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Letters

WINTER FANTASY™ Convention And More

Is the WINTER FANTASY Convention worth it?

Braving the winter storm warnings and threats of dire road conditions, I and my three intrepid companions boldly sallied forth on the long road to Milwaukee. Armed only with my four-wheel drive Chevy Blazer, tapes of our favorite music, three suitcases, two garment bags, and four huge bags of gaming materials, we began the arduous trek from North Carolina. In January! For a three-day gaming convention? Most people thought we'd lost our minds. We weren't too sure we hadn't.

On the second day of the convention, when Jean had to once again assure the people who catered the box lunches that I really did qualify for one of their delicious, nourishing meals even though I hadn't received a ticket for it, she turned to me and asked, "Has the convention been worth it for you?" She seemed worried that the con wasn't making a good impression on me. At the time I laughed, but I spent the rest of the convention thinking about it.

Everyone I talked to had a good time. So did I. As it turned out, I missed playing both the Grand Masters and Star Wars events when I was needed elsewhere, so I only got to play in the Masters and the Benefit. I didn't feel cheated or upset. I still felt like it was "worth it."

It was worth it because I had the chance to see, play among, and talk with old friends. The small size of the convention also meant that there was a good chance to play with the same people more than once. I enjoyed being able to see brand new "familiar faces" and to anticipate having another good time with them. I appreciated being able to walk up to HQ and ask someone a question or turn in a score sheet without having to fight through a mob to do it. I liked having a dealers' room which was small enough to be strolled through in an hour and which wasn't so crowded you had to hold your breath to shove past anyone else. The games weren't so bad, either (well, MOST of them weren't)!

Hotel rooms were cheap. The convention itself was inexpensive. The box lunches were a wonderful idea, fairly low cost, and a real life-saver for anyone tired of chili and hot dogs. Even the weather was kind to us. It held off snowing until we had arrived, snowed just enough to be interesting while we were there, and cleared off before we had to leave.

Of course, it had a few rocky moments (show me a con that doesn't have difficulties and I'll show you a con where nothing is happening). It might be better to designate the meeting areas for the different games like they do at the GEN CON® Game Fair so there is less of a mob scene at the start of each time slot, and it would help if everyone got a copy of the map showing where tables are located. But these are just housekeeping details. As far as I (and the other folks I talked to) am concerned, the WINTER FANTASY convention was a smashing success. It was such a fun con that I'll be back next year even though my car's heater/defroster died on the way—twice!

Nicky Rea,
President, ARC-Fellowship
(with contributing thoughts from Jackie Cassada, Bill Gilsdorf, and Susan Adams)

Newszine Ideas

First, I'd like to say good job on the Newszine, and keep up the good work. Also, in regards to POLYHEDRON® Newszine #78, I agree with Alex Iwanow. I also would like to see interviews with authors and game designers. I'd like to see another interview done with R.A. Salvatore.

I also have an idea for a column. How about starting an AD&D® 2nd edition game PC or NPC column. Readers could send in a description of their character with all the abilities, equipment, magic items, etc., with a brief history on them. This would give everyone a chance to get their favorite character in the spotlight so to speak! I think you'd get a flood of responses on this one. And this may be a way to get those silenced readers out there to respond.

Mike Mierzwa
Forestville, NY

Thanks for the kind words on the Newszine, Mike. As for an interview with Bob Salvatore—okay. Look for it next issue.

And about a character column.... Well, we have that, although we have not had many submissions for it recently. The New Rogues Gallery *was designed to feature characters, be they PCs or NPCs, good guys or villains, from any game system. We have printed single characters and entire parties. If you have favorite PCs or NPCs you'd like to share with other Network members, submit them to the Newszine. Submissions which are properly formatted stand a much better chance of being accepted.*

I would like to respond to the letters in issues #71, #77, and your own questions and statements about young players. I agree with John that younger and older gamers should be encouraged to play together. Also, the various game conventions could hold special "generations" gaming events, containing mixed age groups. This would help to promote play between younger and older gamers. It would also give them the opportunity to meet, become friends, and, very likely, a few of them will find that they live near each other, enabling their friendship and gaming to grow. This could also give them a chance to learn from each other. I am 23 and I began playing at 13 and DMing at 15. But I have always gotten along well with older gamers. Currently I have a player who is age 10, and he is playing with others, aged 15 to 20.

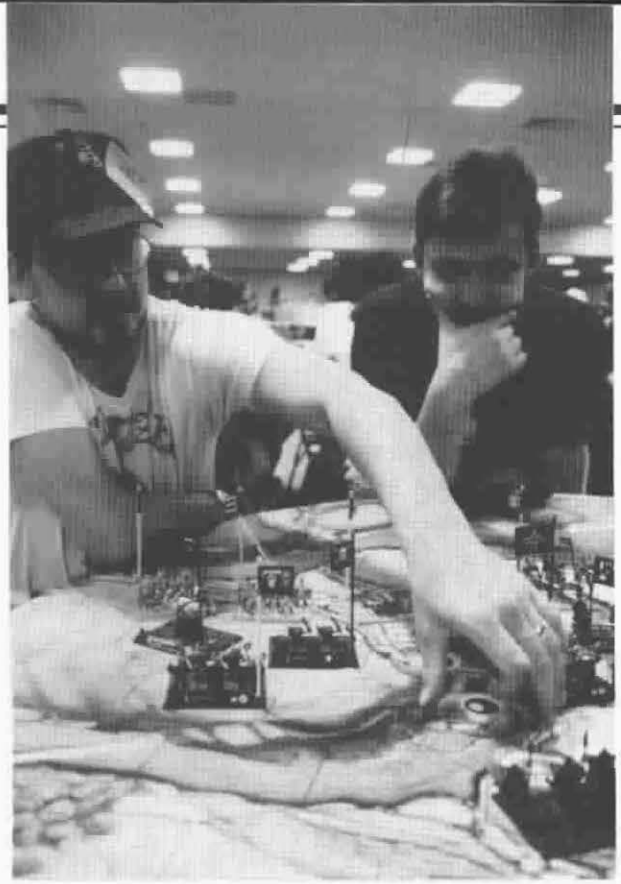
Next, I was wondering why there aren't any game conventions in the central Florida area—namely ones including AD&D® game events. I would think there would be enough gamers to have a good convention.

Michael Parsons
Kissimmee, FL

Michael, keep watching the convention announcement section of the Newszine. There are game conventions in Orlando from time to time. And consider holding your own convention. Use our free classified ads to locate people to help.

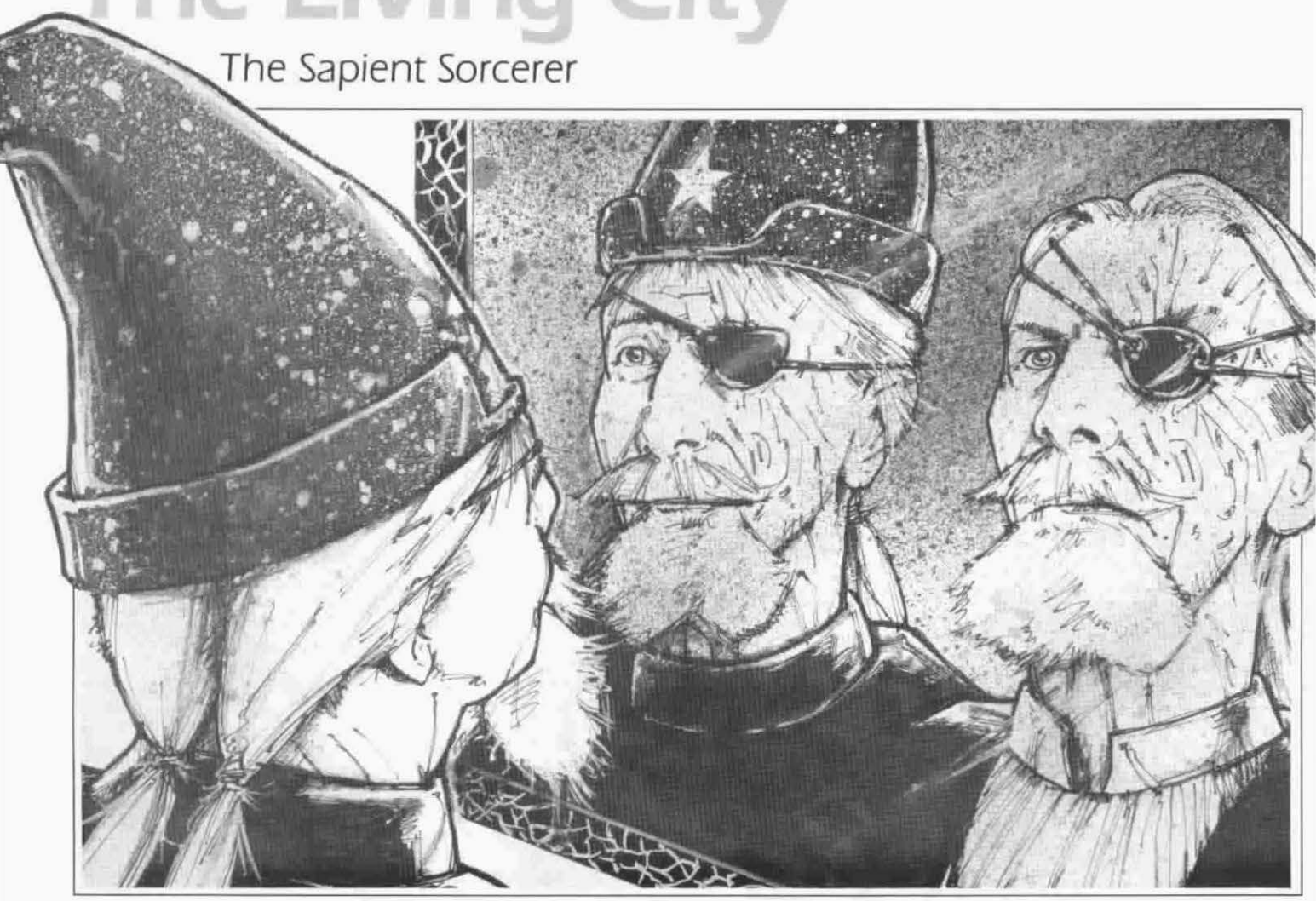
Good Gaming Warmed The Heart

At the Winter Fantasy™ Convention
January 8-10, Milwaukee, WI



The Living City

The Sapient Sorcerer



by John Miller and Jim Dawson

This shabby, one-story shop houses a multitude of items useful to wizards and adventurers. Included are spell components, crucibles, vellum and inks, healing potions, pebbles enchanted with *continual light* spells, and scrolls containing minor spells such as *comprehend languages* and *neutralize poison.* Customers entering the musky, cobwebbed store often find Olcrannon Fossa, the addle-brained mage and owner, sleeping on a cot behind the counter.

As Fossa responds to calls for service, his startling visage comes into view. The right side of his face is scarred and burned. A black patch covers his right eye. His blackened right hand twitches inside his sleeve, evidence that the injury extends along his arm. A short conversation convinces customers that the mage's mind suffers as well.

Fossa seems unduly absent-minded, often changing the topic of discussion in mid-sentence. Slips of his tongue change potions into scrolls, magic items into animals, or "a hundred" into "eight hundred" gold pieces. He frequently rambles into a tale of how he was burned by a red dragon. His distracted manner extends to his spell casting, as he often forgets to learn or cast spells for which he has been paid.

The old mage also delights in turning business discussions into gossip sessions. He queries customers about activities of the government and of the guild houses, cackling gleefully at every snippet of information obtained. Repeat customers often know that enduring Fossa's inane ramblings and giving him tidbits of gossip results in reduced prices. Satisfied customers smile at the ease with which the old dolt is duped.

The shopkeeper, however, is no simpleton. Olecranon Fossa is the evil, cunning, and ruthless Sijen Rios, an illusionist who spies on Ravens Bluff for the Red Wizards of Thay. His Fossa persona allows him to unobtrusively gather information and puts him in a position to bring significant power to bear against Ravens Bluff should the Red Wizards desire. A variety of illusionary disguises enable him to travel the city at night collecting information on the militia, economy, notable visitors, and political affairs.

Sijen Rios (Olecranon Fossa)

17th Level Male Human Illusionist

STR: 14
INT: 18
WIS: 15
DEX: 18
CON: 15
CHA: 14
AC Normal: −6
AC Rear: −2
Hit Points: 48
Alignment: Lawful Evil
Languages: Common, Black Dragon, Elvish
Age: 50
Height: 6′
Weight: 130 lbs.

Weapon Proficiencies: Staff, dagger, dart
Nonweapon Proficiencies: Disguise (14), spellcraft (17), read/write Common (19), etiquette (14), appraising (18)
Magic Items: *Bracers of defense AC 2, ring of protection +4* (+2 on saving throws), *robe of stars, elixir of health, ring of fire resistance, amulet of proof against detection and location, brooch of shielding* (93 charges), *periapt of proof against poison +3, dagger of venom, orb of eldritch power*‡
Spells/day: 5 5 5 5 5 3 3 2 plus one additional Illusion/Phantasm per spell level

‡New item described at the end of this article.

Spell Books:
Level One: *Burning hands, change self*, charm person, enlarge, feather fall, friends, phantasmal force*, read magic;* Level Two: *Blindness*, blur*, continual light, detect good, fog cloud, fool's gold*, Leomund's trap*, levitate, mirror image, whispering wind*, wizard lock;* Level Three: *Blink, explosive runes, fly, gust of wind, haste, hold person, icelance*†, *nightscar*†*, *phantom steed*, spectral force*, water breathing, wraithform*;* Level Four: *Confusion, encrypt*†*, *fear*, fumble, hallucinatory terrain* illusionary wall*, improved invisibility* plague*†*, *rainbow pattern*, shadow monsters;* Level Five: *Demi-shadow monsters*, distance distortion, false vision, feeblemind, major creation*, dream*, secure*†, *shadow magic*, stone shape, telekinesis;* Level Six: *Conjure animals, control weather, demi-shadow magic*, invisible stalker, legend lore, part water, veil*;* Level Seven: *Duodimension, mass invisibility*, monster Summoning V, phase door, reverse gravity, ruby ray of reversal, teleport without error, vanish;* Level Eight: *Glassteel, mass charm, maze, polymorph any object, power word blind, symbol*
†Spell from *FORGOTTEN REALMS® Adventures*
* Illusion/Phantasm spell

Sijen Rios has thin gray hair and a pale complexion. He is lithe and quick-witted, but appears to be frail. A patch worn over his right eye hides his *orb of eldritch power.*

At sixteen, Rios apprenticed himself to a Red Wizard. He practiced his craft day and night, often going without food and sleep. He was soon adept at deceiving and coercing others with his phantasms. After three years, he saw no further value in remaining an apprentice. He killed his master, stole the dead mage's spell books and magic items, and fled Thay to avoid reprisals.

Rios wandered the Realms for years, hiring himself to adventuring parties to acquire new magic. One party discovered the *orb of eldritch power,* which Rios seized for himself. He replaced his right eye with the orb, then slew his companions.

Two decades later, after learning that slaying one's master is acceptable behavior among the Red Wizards, Rios returned to Thay as a free-lance employee of the Wizard's Imperialist faction. He remains loyal to Imperialist faction tenets, but holds fealty to no particular individual. Rios considers his own interests first, and always leaves himself an escape route when dealing with the Red Wizards.

The Harpers have alerted Lord Mayor O'Kane to Rios's presence in Ravens Bluff. They do not know his cover identity, nor do they know about The Sapient Sorcerer. The Lord Mayor, afraid that Rios has infiltrated either the government or the military, is seeking a trustworthy party to ferret out the spy.

Orb of Eldritch Power: This artifact is a thumb-nail-sized black globe. As long as its bearer lives, it can be removed only with a *wish.* The orb is lawful evil, but radiates a chaotic neutral aura that extends over its wearer.

Only evil wizards can handle the orb. Others are shocked for 6d10 points of damage and stunned for 1d12 rounds (no saving throw). When first grasped by an evil wizard, the orb communicates its powers (but not the side effects of those powers) to the character and instructs the character to press it against his or her own naked eye. The wizard can refuse to do this, but then cannot use the orb's powers.

When touched to an eye, the orb painlessly and irreversibly absorbs and replaces the eyeball. Once emplaced, the orb attempts to drain the psyche of its host. Two saves must be made to avoid this. The wizard must save versus death magic at −2 or be irrevocably slain. If not slain, the wizard must save against spells or become incurably insane. The second save is made at a −1 for each power of the orb that is from a school of magic diametrically opposed to the host's. Wisdom bonuses apply to both saves.

Only after the wizard makes both saves and dominates the orb may he or she use its powers. The orb's minor powers are infravision and ultravision to 60′, and double normal human vision. Its primary powers, which function at 15th level, include:

Once a turn: *Clairaudience, clairvoyance, magic mirror, and vision*
Once a day: *Disintegrate, mislead,* and *Evard's black tentacles*
Once a week: *Feeblemind, gate, shades,* and *weird*
Once a month: *Contact other plane* and bestow a *great curse* on one individual whose true name is known to the wizard. The wizard must also possess a personal item belonging to the intended victim. The recipient of the *curse,* who gets no saving throw, is beset each night by horrid nightmares of such a personal nature that sleep is impossible. Each night without sleep reduces the victim's Constitution by one point. When his or her Constitution reaches zero, the victim dies. The *curse,* which returns if the victim is raised or resurrected, can only be removed by a *wish* or a *remove curse* spell from a caster of 16th level or greater.

Bestowing a *great curse* reduces the user's Constitution, Strength, Wisdom, and Intelligence to one-third of their current values. These are restored at the rate of two points each per day; however, there is a 10 percent chance that one point is permanently lost, roll once for each characteristic. In addition, the wearer's Charisma is automatically and permanently reduced by one. Rios's terrible scars are the result of four uses of the *great curse.*

Magnificent Magic

Serious And Whimsical Items From Network Clubs

The Decathlon's Item Creation event generated a bevy of arcane objects. Many of the best entries are presented here. Following each item is the name of the author and the club. The Decathlon is a year-long contest open only to registered clubs. Club forms are available from Network HQ.

Amazing Mice: This wondrous item appears as a small sealed wooden box which rattles when shaken. If the lid is pried off, four brightly colored stone mice spill out. However, opening the box destroys the magic item.

If the command word is spoken while the box has its original seal, it enlarges to become a two-foot square maze with a transparent top, containing four brightly colored mice: yellow, blue, green and red. The mice race for the exit, taking 1d4 rounds. The first mouse to exit the maze will become available for use (see below). The maze and the other three mice will revert to their original form. Roll 1d20 to see which mouse wins the race. Each mouse has a different magical ability:

Roll	Mouse
1-10	Yellow
11-14	Blue
15-18	Green
19-20	Red

Yellow: Immediately casts a *light* spell on itself that will last for one turn.

Blue: Immediately casts a *magic missile* spell (three missiles) at a target indicated by the user's pointing finger.

Green: This mouse casts a *cure light wounds* spell when placed upon a wounded being.

Red: Casts a four-die *fireball* spell when the user points at the location and speaks the desired range.

After a mouse's magic ability has been used, it is transported back inside the box for later use. The maze can be used once a day.
XP Value: 3,000
GP Value: 18,000
Cris Conklin and Doug McDaniel, Saige

Amulet of Lathander: This hammered platinum amulet is fashioned by high-level specialty priests of Lathander, the god of Dawn in the world of Abeir-Toril. If the wearer of the amulet falls during combat (reduced to zero hit points or less), the amulet heals 1d6 points of damage. This function of the amulet operates up to three times a day.

If the amulet is worn by a priest of Lathander, and that priest falls during combat, the amulet casts a *heal* spell upon him. This function also operates up to three times a day.

The amulet only can be worn by individuals of good alignment. Others trying to don the amulet suffer 3d6 points of damage a round until it is removed.
XP Value: 6,000
GP Value: 30,000
Chris Ryan, Brisbane League of Adventurers

Arabel's Huggable Bear: This huggable and lovable stuffed magical bear is made of white ermine. It sports an onyx nose, sapphire eyes, and is stuffed with owlbear down. During the slumber hours, this small bear radiates a three-yard radius *sphere of protection.* This sphere keeps invading forces from entering the mind of any sleeping person. *ESP* and mind-affecting spells, including psionics, will not work on any sleeping subjects within the bear's domain. The stuffed animal also prevents those in its area of effect from suffering bad dreams. Because of the restful nature of sleep while slumbering near the bear, hit points are restored at twice the normal rate.
XP Value: 3,000
GP Value: 30,000
Cheryl McNally Frech, PM Players

Armor of Underwater Action: Found only as chain mail or plate mail, this armor is always airtight and keeps its wearer dry and comfortable. The armor creates a breathable atmosphere that will last for 24 hours before it must sit unused another 24 hours to recharge itself. *Chain mail of underwater action* provides an Armor Class of 5, while *plate mail of underwater action* provides an Armor Class of 3. Either suit allows the wearer to swim 180' per round, provided he has the swimming non-weapon proficiency.
XP Value: 2,000 (chain), 2,500 (plate)
GP Value: 16,000 (chain), 20,000 (plate)
Nigel Wallis, Brisbane League of Adventurers

Arrow of Connection: When fired, this arrow creates a magically supported rope extending from what the arrow hits to where the archer stands, up to a maximum of 300 feet. The rope appears to float in midair and can support up to 3,000 pounds at one time. The rope is indestructible and lasts for 24 hours unless the archer dispels it earlier with a command. When the rope expires or is dispelled, both it and the arrow disappear.
XP Value: 50
GP Value: 300
Alan Grimes, Role Players Guild of Kansas City

Arrow of Detonation: When fired, this arrow flies very slowly, moving only five feet a round. It will travel up to 300 feet before falling to the ground. Each arrow has two command words, and any time during an arrow's course, the archer can utter one of those words, causing the arrow to either explode in a burst of light or to erupt into a ball of flame. The first effect is the same as a *continual light* spell, except that it creates a globe of bright light that illuminates a 100' radius. The second effect is a *fireball* that causes 5d10 points of damage to all creatures within a 50' radius, save versus spell for half damage.
XP Value: 200
GP Value: 2,000
Alan Grimes, Role Players Guild of Kansas City

Arrow of Illumination: When fired, this arrow levitates to a point three feet above the archer's head. The arrow will follow the archer as he travels, adjusting its height if the ceiling lowers. The arrow glows with the equivalent of a *light* spell and will function for 24 turns or until it is broken. Usually 2d4 of these arrows are found together.
XP Value: 30
GP Value: 180
Alan Grimes, Role Players Guild of Kansas City

Bag of the Woodlands: This bag appears to be a simple brown leather shoulder bag with green embroidery. However, in the possession of a druid, its magic becomes active, supplying the druid with an unlimited amount of seeds.

The druid can call forth seeds by the handful or one seed at a time, using the bag's magic up to 24 times a day. The bag only produces non-magical seeds.

Druids who allow the bag to dispense seeds randomly can consult the following chart:

Roll	Seed	Roll	Seed
1	Acorn	11	Cherry Seed
2	Corn Kernel	12	Wheat Grain
3	Aloe Root	13	Thyme Seed
4	Maple Seed	14	Potato Eye
5	Taro Root	15	Walnut
6	Orchid Root	16	Dogwood Seed
7	Banana	17	Coconut
8	Carrot Seed	18	Willow Seed
9	Rose Bulb	19	Evergreen Cone
10	Apple Seed	20	Apple Seed

XP Value: 1,500
GP Value: 5,000
Amy M. Vergara, Gaming Club, Chapter 1 Hawaii

Barding of Flight: This leather horse barding emits only a weak dweomer when *detect magic* is cast. However, when this barding is fitted onto a horse, pony, mule, or donkey, it automatically sizes itself to the mount. When a command word is spoken, a set of feathery wings graft themselves onto the mount, granting the beast flight with a maneuverability class D and a movement rate of 24. The mount can fly up to six hours before needing to rest. For each hour of flight, the mount must rest one hour. If a mount is forced to fly beyond the six-hour limit, the wings disappear, and mount and rider fall to the ground.
XP Value: 4,500
GP Value: 45,000
Roy Piamann, Talons

Barding of Missile Protection: This magical chain barding always has an ornamental design woven into the links. The barding is unusually light, weighing about 45 pounds. When the command word is spoken, the barding sizes itself to fit any horse, from a pony to a heavy war horse. The barding gives the horse a −5 Armor Class against missile attacks and a saving throw vs. spells against *magic missiles*. Against non-missile attacks, the barding confers an AC of 2. The barding can function indefinitely.
XP Value: 2,500
GP Value: 25,000
Roy Piamann, Talons

The Blade of Lightning: Only three of these swords are known to exist. Each is crafted of shining platinum inlaid with golden lightning strokes down the sides. Ten rounds after the blade has been drawn, or upon the speaking of a command word, the sword glows blue and can discharge a seven-die lightning bolt once a round for up to the next seven rounds. When not glowing, the sword gives a +4 bonus "to hit" and damage, and a +5 bonus when used against water-breathing creatures.

On the round the sword begins to glow, the wielder suffers 2d6 points of electrical damage. The wielder suffers 2d6 points of damage each subsequent round until a *lightning bolt* is released. Once the blade has been drawn, it cannot be sheathed until a *lightning bolt* is released.
XP Value: 2,000
GP Value: 10,000
Mike Jastremski, BC 88

Blood Sword: This elegantly crafted long sword gives its wielder a +2 "to hit" and damage bonus against any creature that has blood. Against foes without blood, such as undead, noncorporeal beings, or gaseous creatures, it functions as a normal sword. The sword never needs to be cleaned; any blood on the sword is immediately absorbed into the blade.

Once the sword is drawn, it must strike a creature that has blood before it can be sheathed. The sword's wielder cannot sleep with the sword unsheathed, as the sword, which communicates telepathically, will keep its owner awake until its blood-lust is satisfied.
XP Value: 800
GP Value: 4,000
Glen Seymour, Knights of Poughkeepsie

Bow of Neverending Arrows: These polished long bows of cherry wood have tiny enchanted sapphires set at each end. When the bow string is drawn, the sapphires create an arrow which must be fired within the next three rounds or it will vanish. The magic of the bow is lost if the sapphires are removed.
XP Value: 400
GP Value: 3,000
David Cole, BC 88

Bracers of Blasting: These magical bracers can be activated if the wearer has a Strength of at least 14. The wearer slams the bracers together and yells the command word. Doing so creates a cone of sound that is 120' long, 2' wide at the base, and 30' wide at the far end. All creatures within the cone must save vs. spells. If the save is successful, the creatures are stunned for one round and deafened for two. Those failing the saving throw sustain 1d10 points of damage, are stunned for two rounds, and are deafened for one turn.

If the bracers are quickly slammed together twice, a wave of ultrasonic sound, 1' wide and 100' long is created. The sound weakens materials such as metal, stone, and wood. These objects must save versus disintegration with a +4 bonus or be destroyed. Magical items are immune to the attack.

If the bracers are used more than once a day, there is a 10% cumulative chance per use that they will explode and inflict 4d10 points of damage to the user.
XP Value: 3,500
GP Value: 35,000
Thomas Chambers, Role Players Guild of Kansas City

Bridle of Control: When this simple leather bridle is placed on a mount, the mount must make a save vs. spells at half its normal hit dice or become charmed as if a *charm monster* spell had been cast. The creature's magic resistance, if it has any, is ignored. If the mount successfully saves, the bridle falls off.

The bridle grants the mount the ability to understand the individual who placed the bridle on it. The bridle will only function on creatures large-sized and smaller that have animal intelligence or less.
XP Value: 5,000
GP Value: 25,000
Roy Piamann, Talons

Can of Preserving: Found in various sizes, these cylindrical metal cans act like *bags of holding* except only food can be put into them. If anything else is put into the can, the stored items disappear after three rounds. Any food placed in the cans will not rot or age.

Cans of preserving hold from one cubic foot to six cubic feet of food, depending on the size of the can. Generally a can's physical dimensions are one third of its actual capacity; a one-cubic foot can has a diameter of about 5" and is about 2 ½" high. A six-cubic foot can is about 10" in diameter and about 4" high. The weight of the food placed in a *can of preserving* is unchanged.
XP Value: 100 to 600
GP Value: 500 to 3,000
Seth Ladd, BC 88

The Censor: When this metal plate, roughly 3" square, is thrown at a creature with a chaotic alignment, it will stick to the victim's mouth and prevent speech. The plate will not come off unless a *remove curse, limited wish,* or *wish* spell is cast or the censor's command word is spoken.

The plate hurler must be able to see the target. No "to hit" roll is required. However, the target is allowed a saving throw vs. petrification at a −2 penalty to avoid the plate.
XP Value: 900
GP Value: 9,000
Seth Ladd, BC 88

Chalice of Food-Like Liquid: On command, this ceramic chalice provides a meal in a cup up to three times a day. The meal is a thick liquid that is warm, as filling as a three-course dinner, and tasty.
XP Value: 1,000
GP Value: 5,000
Seth Ladd, BC 88

The Chess Pieces of Fextree: Several thousand years ago, the sorcerer Fextree Belwikker fashioned a powerful set of chess pieces from a red dragon's teeth. Only seven of the original sixteen pieces remain: two pawns, a knight, a bishop, a queen, a king, and a rook. Six of these seven figurines are intricately carved representations of wizards in various poses and of varying majesty. The last piece, the rook, is carved in the image of Fextree's tower. These pieces are each about four inches tall. They are stored in a padded, rectangular case of red cedar, and each piece is held in place by a springy, metal clip. The latch and hinges of the case are fashioned of bronze.

Pawns: The pawns are carved figures of apprentice mages in simple robes and sandals. To invoke the power of a pawn the possessor need only utter the command word, "stalemate," and 10 man-sized, mindless warriors appear to battle the owner's designated enemy.

Warriors (10): Int Low; AL Neutral; AC 3; MV 9; HD 5; hp 40 each; THAC0 16; #AT 1; Dmg 1-8 (long sword); SD Immune to mind-affecting magic; MR 50%; SZ M; ML 20. The warriors battle until they are slain or until 10 rounds pass. They can be summoned once a day.
XP Value: 900
GP Value: 12,000

Knight: This is a figure of a wizard in long flowing robes and a tall pointed hat with a staff in one hand and the reins of the stallion that he is riding in the other. By uttering the command word, "liege," a man-sized knight mounted on a white heavy war horse appears to serve the piece's owner.

Knight (1): Int Very; AL Lawful Neutral; AC 2; MV 9; HD 10; hp 80; THAC0 11; #AT 2; Dmg 1-8 +3/1-8 +3 (long sword +3); SD Immune to mind-affecting magic; MR 50%; SZ M; ML 20. The knight can understand his owner, but cannot converse.

Horse, Heavy War (1): Int Animal; AL N; AC 7; MV 15; HD 3 +3; hp 27; THAC0 17; #AT 3; Dmg 1-8/1-8/1d4; SZ L; ML 20.

The knight and horse require no rest or sustenance and heal at the rate of three hit points a day. The knight and horse can be summoned once a year, and they will faithfully serve the piece's owner for one month, unless slain earlier. They can be dispelled by uttering the command words, "Ye are relieved from duty."
XP Value: 1,000
GP Value: 15,000

Bishop: This is a figure of a stately wizard in high-collared robes and a skullcap. The figure holds a parchment as if reading it. When the command words, "I call on the gods of magic to deliver me a champion," are spoken, a man-sized wizard/priest is summoned.

Wizard/Priest (1): Int Exceptional; AL Neutral; AC 2; MV 9; HD 10; hp 50; THAC0 14; #AT 1; Dmg 1-6 (staff); SD Immune to mind-affecting magic; MR 50%; SZ M; ML 20.

The wizard/priest has the following spells in memory: *cure light wounds* (×4, *slow poison* (×4), *cure disease* (×3, *cure serious wounds* (×3), *cure critical wounds* (×2, *magic missile* (×4), *glitterdust* (×4), *dispel magic* (×3), *rainbow pattern* (×2, and *telekinesis* (×2).

The wizard/priest will remain with the piece's owner for up to three days, unless killed or dismissed earlier. It cannot rememorize spells during this time. The wizard/priest does not require any rest or sustenance. It can understand the piece's owner, but cannot speak other than to utter spells. The wizard/priest can be summoned once every 10 days.
XP Value: 1,250
GP Value: 18,750

Rook: This piece is a model of a small, slim tower with a pointed roof and thin, high windows. Its powers can be invoked twice a month. Uttering the command words, "Raise the Keep," instantly produces a 80′ square and 40′ high stone building. The keep has two floors, modest furnishings, a well-stocked larder, and six mindless humanoid servants. The keep has a stout, iron-bound oaken door which will only open for the bearer of the piece. The keep comfortably houses 10 people for up to two weeks, after which if the bearer does not utter the command phrase again, the building disappears. The keep can be dispelled prior to this time by uttering the command, "rook surrenders."
XP Value: 6,000
GP Value: 30,000

Queen: This carved figure depicts a shapely sorceress clad in flowing robes with a circlet around her head. Her arms are stretched upward in front of her in a V-shaped casting stance. She can be summoned once a month by uttering the command word. Unlike the other chess pieces, the animated form of the queen retains the size of the carved piece. The queen must be carried or she will revert to her carved, inanimate state.

Queen (1): Int Exceptional; AL Neutral; AC 8; MV 12; HD NA; hp 30; THAC0 Nil; #AT Nil; SD Immune to mind-affecting magic; MR 50%; SZ M; ML 20.

Once a day, the animated queen can call forth a *globe of invulnerability* to encase and move with the individual holding her. The *globe* functions for one hour per level of the queen's holder. The *globe* can be dispelled earlier at the holder's desire.

In addition, the queen can cast *hold portal, hold person, hold undead,* and *hold monster* each once a day, each cast at her holder's level. The targeted creatures are allowed saving throws vs. spell.

The queen will remain animate for two days and can be summoned to serve the piece's owner once a month.
XP Value: 2,000
GP Value: 30,000

King: This carved figure is a stately sorcerer in a high-collared robe with an ornate crown on his head and a gnarled staff in his hand. Speaking the command words, "Beguile Ye," calls upon the figurine's wizardly power. The king, which does not animate, glows with a pale amber light and a *mass charm* spell is released as if it were cast by a 16th level wizard. This power can be called upon once a month.

Speaking the command words, "Make me a king," creates a town and surrounding fields that cover four square

miles and holds 500 villagers. The town has homes, shops, artisans, craftsmen, peasants, a town watch, and all the other trappings of a rural community. The people behave normally and believe their forefathers have dwelt here for centuries. They can relate local lore that fits in with the geographical area. They also know intuitively that the possessor of the king chess piece is their liege. The people cannot leave their village. However, other creatures and characters can enter and leave as they desire. The village lasts for two months unless dispelled earlier by the holder of the piece. This power can be called upon once a year.
XP Value: 8,000
GP Value: 40,000
Mark McPherson, Brisbane League of Adventurers

Circlet of Psionic Enhancement: This item is a silver headpiece with a large amethyst embedded in it. When worn by a non-psionicist, the circlet improves saving throws vs. mental attacks by +1.

When worn by a psionicist, however, the full power of the item is unleashed. The psionicist recovers PSPs at double the normal rate. He can use the Contact devotion (if known) at half the usual PSP cost, and if the optional power score rule is used, he can alter power check rolls up or down one point to try to achieve his score (a 20 still fails). Finally, once a day, the circlet lets the psionicist use one science or one devotion of his choice at no initial cost (he must still pay the maintenance cost, however). The science or devotion must be one that the psionicist currently knows.
XP Value: 6,000
GP Value: 65,000
Trey Strong, Saige

Cloak of Strength: These exquisitely tailored cloaks are made of dark green velvet and are decorated with a red gem that rests above the wearer's heart. When the wearer touches the gem, he gains a permanent +1 bonus to his Strength and the cloak and gem disappear.
XP Value: 3,000
GP Value: 30,000
David Cole, BC 88

Cloak of Weather: This hooded cloak automatically changes thickness, texture, and style to accommodate almost any natural weather condition. Hence, it keeps its wearer dry in the rain, warm in a blizzard, and pleasantly cool in a blazing desert.
XP Value: 1,500
GP Value: 7,500
Scott Gries, FOG

Collars of Protection: These collars range from plain strips of leather to ornate, jeweled bands of fur and chain. The collars were originally made by a Ravens Bluff wizard who was worried about his pets' safety. He designed them to only function on small- and medium-sized creatures of animal intelligence or less. Some collars are more powerful than others, as the devices have from +1 to +5 protection bonuses.
XP Value: 1,000 to 5,000
GP Value: 10,000 to 50,000
Roy Piamann, Talons

Courtesan's Cream: This magical ointment is applied to the wearer's body and has an exotic, pleasant smell. Each application of the cream lasts for 2d6 hours and enhances the wearer's Charisma. The amount of Charisma gained depends on the wearer's normal Charisma, as noted in the chart below. The cream will not work in conjunction with magical spells, although it will function simultaneously with items such as a *rod of splendor.*

Natural Charisma	Bonus	Maximum Score
3-11	+2d4	16
12-15	+1d6	19
16-18	+1d4	21

One jar contains enough cream for three applications. Only one dose of cream may be worn at a time.
XP Value: 500
GP Value: 750
Ed Gibson, Beyond

Defender's Harp: Although a powerful magic item, this medium-sized harp only faintly radiates magic when a *detect magic* spell is cast. When the highest-pitched chord is plucked, all non-magical weapons, shields, and glass objects within 100 feet of the musician must make a saving throw versus crushing blow or immediately shatter. This power can be used once an hour.

Bards who play a *defender's harp* can call upon the instrument's secondary power. This allows bards to double their ability to alter NPC reaction rolls.
XP Value: 5,000
GP Value: 20,000
Scott Gries, FOG

Dragon Cloak: These heavy cloaks of dragon hide give their wearers a +3 saving throw bonus vs. any type of dragon breath. In addition, they confer a +6 saving throw bonus versus specific breath weapons. For example, a *red dragon cloak* provides a +6 saving throw bonus vs. a red dragon's fiery breath weapon. A *blue dragon cloak* protects against lightning breath. A *black dragon cloak* protects against acid breath. A *white dragon cloak* protects against a cold breath, etc.
XP Value: 1,000
GP Value: 10,000
John Bailies, Brisbane League of Adventures

Earrings of Understanding: These earrings are often made of polished wood or silver. Each earring bears a picture of an ear in its center. When the user wears a pair of these enchanted earrings, he can understand any language spoken to him. However, the earrings do not confer the ability to speak any language. If the user only wears one of the earrings, he must save vs. petrification or be *confused* as the spell for one turn.
XP Value: 500
GP Value: 4,000
Seth Ladd, BC 88

Familiar Protection Enhancement Bands: This item consists of two pieces, a thin band that is placed about a familiar's neck and which automatically adjusts itself to the size of the animal, and another band which is worn about a finger or on an ear of the wizard.

The bands allow the familiar to travel away from the wizard a number of miles equal to the wizard's level, with no ill effects befalling the animal or wizard. In addition, twice a day, the wizard is able to see through his familiar's eyes for 10 minutes. The wizard can perform no other function while doing this. Familiars receive the Armor Class of the wizard, if it is better than their own.
XP Value: 2,000
GP Value: 12,000
Chris Ryan, Brisbane League of Adventurers

Gloves of the Feline: These leather gloves are embossed in gold with an image of a type of cat. Common images include panthers and tigers. The gloves are aligned, usually neutral good or chaotic good, and will not function for an individual whose alignment does not match the gloves'.

The gloves provide the following abilities if worn by an individual of matching alignment:

- The wearer gains the rogue climb walls ability at 80%.
- If the wearer falls, he always lands on his feet, suffering the minimum damage possible.
- In unarmed combat, the wearer can cause claws to spring forth from the gloves' fingertips. He can attack with these twice a round; a successful hit causes 1d4 points of damage.
- The wearer can *jump,* as the wizard spell, once a day.

XP Value: 2,000
GP Value: 10,000
Chris Ryan, Brisbane League of Adventurers

Hefiz's Suberb Shiny Shoes: These shoes appear to be shiny shoes or soft leather boots; they come in all humanoid sizes. They usually are black and seem to be ideal shoes for moving silently. Also known as Clown's Shoes of Hefiz, these cursed items were created to plague thieves and their ilk. No magic radiates from these shoes, but they have a peculiar curse, and they are often returned to be sold in markets or shops after the owner discovers their tru nature.

When first donned by a living being, these shoes transform into a pair of shiny, noisy, and gleaming shoes that are two feet long. Perhaps worst of all, they shine brightly in the dark. While wearing these shoes, it is impossible to run, leap, spring, walk silently, hide in shadows, be invisible, or tightrope walk. To remove these obnoxious shoes, a *dispel magic,* or *remove curse* spell must be used. The shoes can be peeled off if 20 points of damage are done to the shoes. If the latter method is used, 20 points of damage (probably self-inflicted) are also inflicted upon the wearer. This process renders the victim's feet rather tender. Until all the damage is healed, the victim's movement is reduced to 1 and Dexterity is reduced by two-thirds.

After being removed and abandoned by their possessor, the shoes transform back to their appealing appearance of magnificent shiny shoes, or superb soft boots.
XP Value: None
GP Value: 1,000
Vincent Graux, Epees et Sortileges

Helm of the Insect: The helm is a shimmering green, eyeless hood with holes for the nose and mouth. It is made of a thin, but surprisingly strong fabric, and it is held in place by an intricate clasp in the form of interlocking mantis heads. To use the hood, it must be placed over the head of any human or demi-human and secured with the clasp. One round later, two hideous bug eyes appear on either side of the hood and two vicious looking mandibles extend from either side of the wearer's mouth.

The helm gives the character 360-degree vision and grants a +1 bonus to surprise rolls. Wearing the helm also allows the wearer to understand the speech of insects, although it does not impart the ability to speak with them.

Once a day, the wearer can cast *summon swarm* as if he were a 9th level wizard. Finally, a character wearing the helm can bite with the mandibles for 1d4 points of damage.
XP Value: 1,000
GP Value: 5,000
Jim Lockhart, Novice

Honing Stone: This magical item appears to be a normal stone, but it will glow faintly green if a *detect magic* spell is cast. If a sword or other edged weapon is rubbed against the stone, the weapon permanently gains or loses one plus. Consult the chart below.

Weapon bonus	Chance bonus increases 1	Chance bonus decreases 1
0	90	10
+1	70	30
+2	60	40
+3	40	60
+4	30	70
+5	10	90

Each stone has 2d4 charges when found. Sharpening a weapon expends one charge.
XP Value: 500
GP Value: 5,000
Alan Grimes, Role Players Guild of Kansas City

Hugrin's Spice Shaker: The renowned mage and chef Hugrin created this magical spice shaker. It appears as a small cylinder with a large "H" written on one end. Each shake can yield an ounce of any spice desired. To produce a spice the user must speak the command word followed by the name of the desired spice and then shake the spice maker with the H side down. Each spice shaker can be used 100 times before it must be recharged.
XP Value: 800
GP Value: 5,000
Cheryl McNally Frech, PM Players

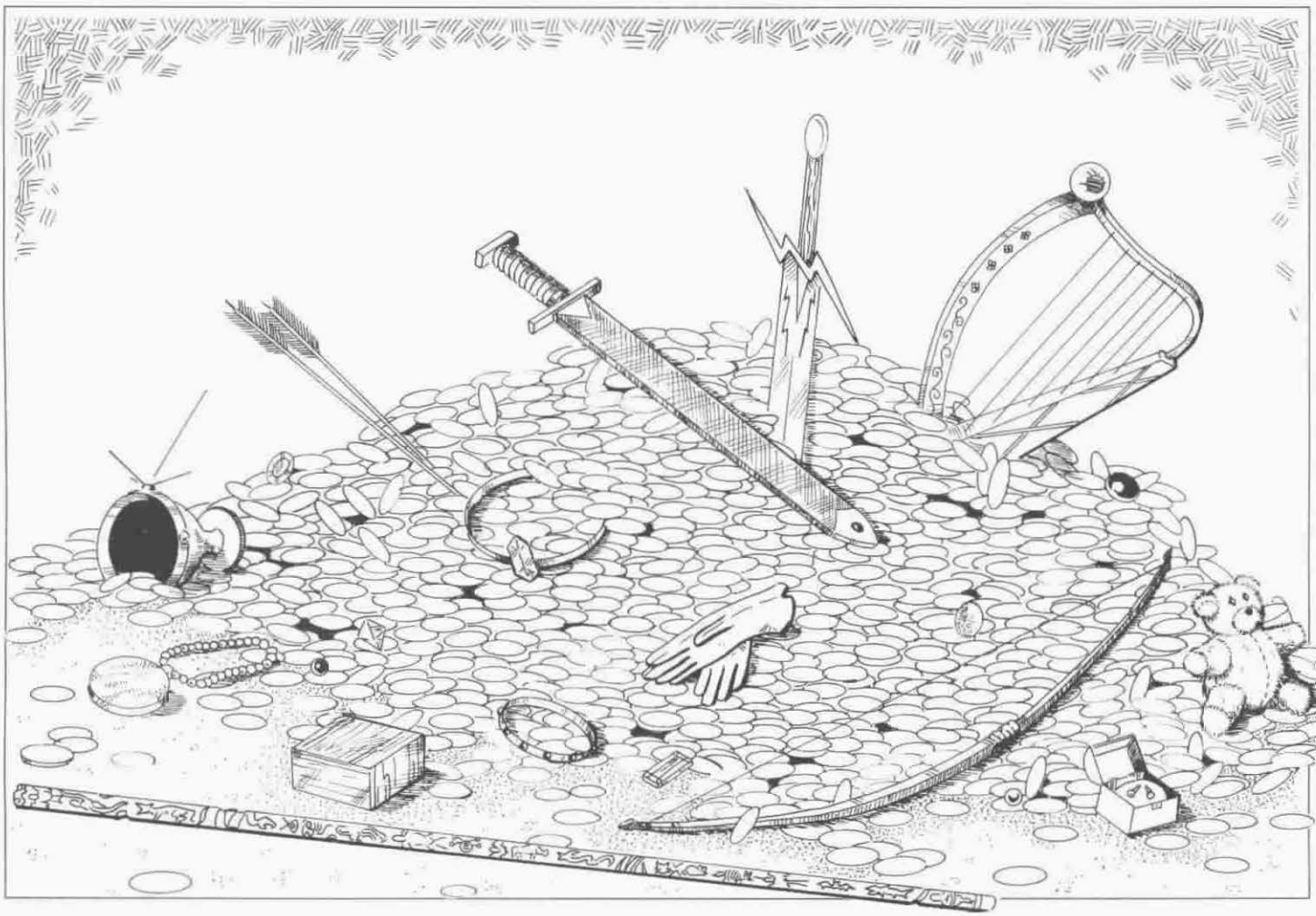
Itzpix's Collapsible Water Barrel: When assembled, this two- and-a-half cubic foot device can hold about 15 gallons of water. When disassembled, the barrel fits inside a three-foot by eight-inch sack. The barrel, which consists of a collection of metal rods and a tailored piece of canvas, has been enchanted so it will not leak. Only weapons of +2 or greater can puncture the canvas.

The collapsible water barrel was designed and first built by the famous gnome engineer-wizard Itzpix of the Quickmind clan. The assembly sequence of this device is not obvious. It takes some intelligence and practice to be able to put this water receptacle together. However, it is simple to take apart. This device is most often used by clerics during their travels to hold the results of *create food and water* spells. In areas where water is rancid, fouled water can be collected in this device and by means of a drop of *sweet water* be made pure.
XP Value: 500
GP Value: 3,000
Cheryl McNally Frech, PM Players

Kura, The Darkness: This unique onyx shard can be worn around the neck on a chain or at the belt as a netsuke. It is smooth and curves slightly, looking almost like a miniature katana. If none of the *shard's* special powers are being used, the onyx radiates an aura of abjuration magic. The magic detected is the spell that locks Kura, an intelligent being from the Negative Material Plane, into the stone. Kura was tricked into the stone centuries ago by a ninja/wu jen. Kura has two goals—to free itself and to assist anyone who makes use of the power of darkness.

Kura has an affinity with ninja, and will badger any wearer into becoming a ninja. The stone will not willingly serve non-rogues. Kura is by nature temperamental and devious. Over the centuries that Kura has spent trapped in the shard (most of the time serving ninja), the creature has developed a strong distrust of humans.

Kura is Chaotic Neutral and is treated as weapon with an Intelligence of 14, an Ego of 10, and a personality of 24. Kura speaks to its wielder by telepathy and has the following abilities, functioning as if cast by an 8th level wu jen and usable once a day: *detect invisibility,*



darkness 15' radius, and *fly.* In addition, it can generate a blade of negative plane energy in the shape of any medium or small melee weapon. The blade is pitch black, effectively invisible in the dark, and has a +3 bonus to hit and damage on all targets except undead. When used against undead, the item suffers a −1 penalty on to hit and damage rolls.
XP Value: 5,000
GP Value: 35,000
Dave Wetzel, Valiant 13th Regiment

Magic Mice: *Magic mice* are half-inch figurines of mice carved from brightly colored stone. They are usually found in sets of 2-8, contained in a small leather pouch. When the command word is spoken, the figurines become real mice, retaining their bright colors. *Magic mice* can burrow through earth at a movement rate of 10, or burrow/chew through wood or a similar material at a movement rate of 5. They can climb almost any surface at a movement rate of 10 (very smooth, slippery or very smooth, slightly slippery surfaces at a rate of 5). The mice also can follow simple instructions and answer "yes" and "no" questions with a shake of their heads. This enables the mice's owner to learn about things the mice have seen or heard.

The mice remain animate for up to three turns, or until they are slain or ordered back inside their pouch. *Magic mice* can be used once a day.
XP Value: 1,000
GP Value: 8,000
Cris Conklin, Saige

Mondasso's Automated Spell Scroll: These scrolls were developed by a mage who wandered Abeir-Toril for decades creating various devices to aid in speeding scroll manufacture. The most successful of his experiments, *Mondasso's magical automated spell scrolls,* appear to be rather plain lengths of vellum, with the only writing on them being a monogrammed "M" at the top.

To use a scroll, a wizard must sleep for several hours, as if he needed to memorize spells. When the wizard awakens, he rolls out one of *Mondasso's magical automated spell scrolls,* spreads 10 gp worth of ink on the paper, and begins to memorize a spell. As the spell is being memorized, instead of being inscribed in the wizard's memory, the ink coalesces in magical words, transcribing the spell onto the scroll. A scroll can hold up to 20 spell levels before being filled. Spells can be transcribed onto a scroll only once.
XP Value: 3,000
GP Value: 15,000
David W. Baker, Rathskeller Gamers

Monocle of Magic: This single glass lens only reveals its magical property if it is used by a wizard or by a thief of at least 10th level. When worn, the monocle gives these characters the ability to

read magic any time they desire, up to three hours a day. After three hours, the monocle blackens to recharge itself. A character can perform no other action while he is *reading magic.*
XP Value: 500
GP Value: 6,000
John Bailies, Brisbane League of Adventures

Norval's Timely Portrait: This small magical canvas, inset in a wooden frame, fits into the palm of one's hand. To use the item a command word is spoken and the canvas side is held up to a living subject for 10 minutes. At the end of this time an image of the subject appears painted upon the canvas surface. During the life of the subject, the painted figure will mimic the individual, showing age and well being. At the point that the subject passes from this world (either by dying or leaving the plane), the canvas is wiped clean and is ready to be used again.
XP Value: 750
GP Value: 4,000
Cheryl McNally Frech, PM Players

Ohm's Black Box: Created by the famed wizard-naturalist Ohm, the box is a perfect 12-inch cube with a dull black finish. It weighs only one pound, and its surface is smooth and has no apparent openings.

The box was designed to carry creatures as large as 10 feet tall and as heavy as one ton. The box is aware of the creature's needs and provides a habitable environment for up to five days. For example, the box will provide a soft bed and lounge (complete with a seven-course-meal) for a pampered halfling, or a salt water pool and fresh fish for a kuo-toa. A creature left in the box for longer than five days is automatically released. Only one creature can be kept in the box at any one time.

The box's inhabitant is oblivious to the outside world; dropping or rapping on the box goes unnoticed by those inside. However, destroying the box will dispel the magic and release the occupant. Creatures inside the box can escape only by means of a *wish*, or *limited wish.* All forms of teleportation and inter-planar travel are nullified inside the box. However, magic resistant creatures can check their magic resistance once each time the box is used against them. If the roll fails, the creature can be trapped for five days, just as any other creature can. Creatures trapped in the box cannot be detected by any form of scrying or divination except for *contact other plane* or *commune* spells, which work normally with respect to the trapped creature. Trapped creatures cannot communicate with the outside word via telepathy or other psionic abilities.

To trap a creature inside the box, the owner must place the box within 10 feet of the creature and speak the command word. The creature is transported into the box in a blinding flash. If more than one creature, including the box's owner, is within 10 feet of the box, all potential captives are allowed a saving throw versus spell. The creature that fails its saving throw is trapped in the box. If more than one creature fails to save, the one closest to the box is trapped.

A second command word releases the creature from the box. The box's owner must be outside of the box to issue this command.

Each command can be issued once a day.
XP Value: 1,250
GP Value: 12,500
Michael Morrow, FOG

Oyori of the Unknown Warrior: This oriental (kozakuran) armor +2 has been enchanted to display the family mon (crest) of the wearer. When first found, the armor is stark white. However, when it is put on, it immediately turns black, and the wearer's family mon appears on the chest plate in the appropriate colors.

If a warrior is killed while wearing the armor, it immediately returns to its white state, the color of death and mourning.

The wearer can change the appearance of his armor, aiding him to pass as another individual or to disguise himself. The armor can duplicate any color and mon that the wearer imagines. In order to invoke this power, the wearer must make an Intelligence check at a −3 penalty. The amount by which the die roll is under the wearer's Intelligence is the number of hours the armor will bear the new appearance.
XP Value: 2,000
GP Value: 12,000
Dave Wetzel, Valiant 13th Regiment

Padriac's Portable Purveyor of Parfait Potions: This six-inch cube is made of pale blue crystal and is divided into four cube-shaped compartments. Each compartment contains a different colored translucent liquid; one each of ruby, amber, emerald, and sapphire. There are four buttons on the bottom of the container, each under a compartment. The buttons, which correspond to a colored liquid, must be pressed to make the item work. An unbreakable beaker is attached to the cube.

The purveyor manufactures one potion per day. By pressing three of the four buttons, in any sequence, the user causes liquid to be dispensed into the beaker. Each of the two dozen possible permutations yields a different result. The item will not function for 24 hours after it dispenses a potion.

Consult the table below to determine possible combinations. DMs are free to create their own combination charts. Abbreviations for the liquids are R-ruby, A-amber, E-emerald, and S-sapphire.

A-E-R	Poison, type D
A-E-S	*Oil of preservation*
A-R-E	*Potion of vampire control*
A-R-S	*Oil of fumbling*
A-S-E	*Potion of extra-healing*
A-S-R	No effect
E-A-R	*Potion of healing*
E-A-S	*Potion of ESP*
E-R-A	*Potion of delusion*
E-R-S	*Oil of Slipperiness*
R-A-E	*Potion of clairvoyance.*
R-A-S	No effect
R-E-A	*Sweet water*
R-E-S	*Potion of clairvoyance*
R-S-A	*Oil of disenchantment*
R-S-E	Poison, type L
S-A-E	*Potion of heroism*
S-A-R	Poison, type J
S-E-A	Poison, type J
S-E-R	*Philter of love*
S-R-A	Poison, type O
S-R-E	*Potion of invisibility*

XP Value: 10,000
GP Value: 50,000
Glen Overby, Pegasus

Parchment of Spell Stealing: This item appears to be a normal sheet of parchment, but it is embossed with "db" in the bottom corner. When unrolled and left within 10 feet of a bard or wizard, the first spell cast will fail and the formula for the spell will appear in flowing script on the parchment. Once it has copied a spell, the parchment rolls itself up. Each sheet of parchment can only copy one spell. Typically 1d12 sheets of parchment are found together. Stolen spells cannot be used as scrolls, but they can be used to research the stolen spell according to the rules in the DMG, pages 41 and 43-44.
XP Value: 500

GP Value: 5,000
James Dempsey, Kenneth and the Apocolypse

Pegleg of Immurk The Invincible: Immurk the Invincible was the first great pirate of the Pirate Isles in the Inner Sea of Abeir-Toril. Although legends of his pirating abound, many people do not know that Immurk was also a powerful wizard. Midway through Immurk's career, he lost his leg while boarding another ship. Soon thereafter he created a special pegleg to replace his own. Immurk and his leg were lost at sea. However, tales abound of the leg being passed from adventurer to adventurer in treasure hauls.

When grafted onto a person's body, the pegleg automatically lengthens or shortens to be the appropriate length so the person can walk normally. It grants the nonweapon proficiencies of navigation, seamanship, rope use, swimming, and weather sense (all with base success scores of 18), and makes the wearer immune to seasickness. Further, Immurk's pegleg grants the harpoon weapon proficiency and allows the wearer to fight as a 12th level fighter when brandishing a harpoon or cutlass. The pegleg allows the wearer to summon a parrot familiar (even if the wearer is not a wizard), which will be bound to the summoner as a normal familiar.

If the leg is rapped against something, a *knock* spell is released. This function can be used up to three times a day. The pegleg can also detect gold coins within a 100' radius.
XP Value: 5,000
GP Value: 30,000
Brett Bakke, Novice

Potion of Curing Lycanthropy: Drinking this rare potion cures the imbiber of any form of lycanthropy. If the imbiber does not suffer from lycanthropy, he must make a saving throw vs. poison or fall unconscious for 1d4 turns because of the potent ingredients in the liquid.
XP Value: 250
GP Value: 2,000
John Bailies, Brisbane League of Adventures

Potion of Poison Negation: Imbibing this potion makes the drinker immune to all ingested or injected poisons for the next 18 hours. This does not include poison gas or poisons that were ingested prior to drinking the *potion of poison negation*.
XP Value: 250
GP Value: 400
John Bailies, Brisbane League of Adventurers

Pouch of Duplication: This finely-crafted leather pouch can duplicate any non-magical, non-living item that weighs three pounds or less. A single item must be placed into the pouch and a charge expended for the pouch's magic to take effect. After three rounds, a permanent, duplicate item is formed, and both items can be removed from the pouch.

Pouches of duplication can be used up to five times a day. They typically are found with 4d8 charges, and they can be recharged.
XP Value: 4,000
GP Value: 40,000
David Cole, BC 88

Puppy Putty: This material is found in small, sealed jars. Puppy putty is a black clay, somewhat cold and wet, but pleasing to the touch. To use puppy putty, a character must mold it into a round ball and press it firmly on the end of his nose. The putty will remain on the wearer for 2-5 hours, unless it is removed earlier.

One round after it has been applied to a nose, the character's sense of smell becomes remarkably acute and he is compelled to travel on his hands and knees. The character gains the tracking nonweapon proficiency while the putty is in place. Characters who already possess the proficiency temporarily gain a +3 bonus to the proficiency score.

The wearer gains a +2 bonus to surprise rolls. Further, a character wearing puppy putty gets +2 on saving throws vs. poison gases, due to the character's increased chance of noticing the gas and reacting before complete exposure.

A jar of puppy putty usually contains four uses.
XP Value: 250
GP Value: 400
Jim Lockhart, Novice

Quill of Pyrophilius: More than two dozen quills are known to have been enchanted by a mighty magician living on Abeir-Toril. Each quill is made from a Ki-Rin feather, and the spirit of a sprite has been forcibly trapped within. The sprite listens to any intelligible conversation within normal hearing distance and writes it down on the nearest piece of paper, or any other suitable substance. The quill never runs out of ink, and cannot move, other than to write. Any language that is heard by the quill can be transcribed, being written in the language being spoken. If more than one person is speaking at a time, the quill transcribes the loudest voice. The quill is activated by a specific command word, and can be deactivated by restating the command word, or physically destroying the item, which frees the trapped sprite.
XP Value: 1,000
GP Value: 6,000
David W. Baker, Rathskeller Gamers

Razor of Close Shaving: Prized by nobility, these straight-edged razors are made of platinum and are encrusted with diamonds. They are valued between 10,000 and 15,000 gp. The blade is +1, allowing the user to shave with little chance marring his face. Characters shaved with the razor gain a +1 Charisma bonus for that day. The razor also can be used in combat, functioning as a small knife.
XP Value: 100
GP Value: 10,000-15,000
Michele C. Kereszturi, Novice

Ring of Keys: Ten keys dangle from this large ring. Each has a 10% chance to open any lock that requires a key.
XP Value: 500
GP Value: 2,500
Mike DeArruda, FOG

Ring of Lighting: This band is gaudily decorated and has a compartment which opens. Inside is a piece of volcanic rock which has been smoothed and enchanted. The rock is magically heated, so that it will set afire any flammable material it touches. The rock will burn anyone touching it, causing 1d4 hit points of damage a round. The ring can be used 10 times in a 24-hour period.
XP Value: 500
GP Value: 2,500
Nigel Wallis, Brisbane League of Adventurers

Ring of the Phoenix: This fine, gold band is usually mistaken for a *ring of fire resistance*, as spells identify it as such. However, the ring has a special property that is released if its wearer dies from natural or magical fire. If this occurs, the ring melts into the wearer's finger, and the wearer is reincarnated into a human phoenix. Physically, the reincarnated character looks the same as before death, except that the character has bright orange skin and deep red

eyes. The character's alignment changes to neutral good, and the character is instilled with the urge to fight evil at every opportunity. The character retains all class powers and abilities and is bestowed with the following innate spell abilities, cast at 12th level:

- *Fire resistance,* always in effect.
- *Affect normal fires,* three times a day.
- *Fireball,* once a day.
- *Pyrotechnics,* once a day.
- *Wall of fire,* once a week.

XP Value: 4,000
GP Value: 40,000
Doug Roderick, Beyond

Ring of the Valiant: These plain silver bands are engraved in Ancient Elvish with the names of the wizards who created them. Once the property of an order of holy warriors, only 12 of these rings are known to survive. Each ring has the power to assume the shape of any melee weapon for which the wearer is proficient. The wearer simply concentrates on the type of weapon to be created. These weapons are +2 unless they are in the hands of a paladin. In this case, the rings always form *holy avengers.* The created weapons cannot be affected by *dispel magic.* A *rod of cancellation* will force them back to ring form for one full day.

Once a *ring of the valiant* has been placed on a finger, it only can be removed by a *limited wish, wish,* or the wearer's death.
XP Value: 5,000
GP Value: 35,000
Eric Lazarian, Valiant 13th Regiment

Roses of Ravenloft: Deep in the murky forests of the Demi-plane of Dread, scattered rose bushes grow. These rare plants, believed to have been created by one of the plane's powerful lords, are enchanted in a most foul and insidious manner.

The roses on the bush possess an unearthly beauty. While the stems are a dull greenish-gray, the petals are the deepest blood red. The supernatural beauty and scent of the roses entices any living human or demi-human coming within 15 feet of the garden to save vs. spells or pick at least one rose. The effects of the roses are as follows.

- Anyone who picks a rose gains a +1 Charisma bonus.
- The character's skin and hair coloration becomes exaggerated; the skin becomes pale white, jet black, bright yellow, or another color as appropriate for the character's original skin color. Blond hair becomes platinum or white, while dark hair turns raven black.
- The individual who picked the rose will no longer age, nor will any object that he is touching or wearing. The possessor of the rose in effect becomes immortal, although he can still die through physical means.
- Any object the possessor of the rose touches and then releases will immediately age at a rapid rate, disintegrating into dust within moments.
- If the possessor of the rose attempts to rid himself of it, or if he should lose it, he will quickly age also, one year for each round he is free of the bloom.

Only a *wish* will allow the holder of a rose to drop it without ill effects.

The bushes die if they are dug up or transplanted.
XP Value: None
GP Value: None
Brett Bakke, Novice

Saddle of Taming: This saddle appears to be an ordinary horse saddle. However, it will fit most four-legged mounts, including rhinoceros, hippogriffs and pegasi. Its magic is revealed when it is placed on a wild or untamed animal. The animal is immediately tamed and will respond to the rider's commands as long as the saddle remains on it. If the saddle is removed, the mount reverts to its original temperament.
XP Value: 2,000
GP Value: 10.000
Mike DeArruda, FOG

Scrollcases of Document Transmission: This magical item has two parts, a scrollcase that is used as the transmitter, and a nearly identical case that serves as the receiver. When the user places a non-magical scroll in the transmitting case and utters a command word, the scroll vanishes. Three rounds later, the scroll appears in the receiver case and the sender hears a tone to indicate the scroll has been sent.

The scrollcases can be separated by up to 1,000 miles. If the cases are farther apart than that, they do not function.

If someone attempts to transmit a magical scroll, both the scroll and the two cases are destroyed.

The scrollcases are prized by adventurers who send messages, plans, maps, and requests for aid to their associates.
XP Value: 3,000
GP Value: 15,000
Chris Hadgis, Brisbane League of Adventurers

Shakuhaci of Peace: Many centuries ago, Chujenko, a flute-maker on the island nation of Wa, showed extraordinary hospitality to a wandering priestess. The priestess was in reality a local greater nature spirit, and she was so impressed with Chejenko's kindness that she taught him to create shakuhaci filled with the peace of the woods. Chujenko produced a number of these flutes for the priests of the Eight Million Gods sect. The flutes can be found all over Wa, and more rarely in Kozakura.

In all respects, these shakuhaci look like any other oriental bamboo flute; there are four sound-holes on the top and one on the bottom, and it is played held vertically down from the mouth. Anyone holding the flute can play it as if he had the appropriate proficiency. Characters with the musical instrument proficiency gain a +2 bonus when playing the flute.

The magical abilities of the flute can only be invoked by those who revere peace and nature. Each ability corresponds to a different tune.

- *Calm,* as a shujenka of 6th level, once a day.
- *Protection from spirits,* 15' radius, twice a day.
- *Pacify,* as if cast by a 12th level shujenka.

In the hands of a shujenka, the flute provides a bonus to purification rituals, as follows:

d20	Bonus
1-9	+5%
10-15	+10%
16-19	+15%
20	+20%

XP Value: 2,000-3,500
GP Value: 14,000-24,500
Dave Wetzel, Valiant 13th Regiment

Slack's Seamless Spell Book: This is a spell book with a special ability. When the command word is uttered, the binding seals to create a seamless cover that cannot be opened without damaging the book. A separate command word is used to unseal the book. If the book is forced open, the book and any spells within it are destroyed. *Knock* and *dispel magic* spells are ineffective on this magic item. To date, only traveling spell books with this ability have been created.
XP Value: 2,000
GP Value: 10,000
Cheryl McNally Frech, PM Players

Spectral Sword: This lightweight, well-balanced +2 weapon can be either

a long sword, bastard sword, or scimitar. The hilt is encrusted with jewels and has a skull on the pommel. The blade is non-corporeal and is transparent in lighted surroundings. However, in the dark the blade has a bluish cast and smoke appears to dance along its edge.

A *spectral sword* can be used by any character, regardless of a character's weapon proficiency. The wielder suffers no proficiency penalties. However, the sword only can be used against undead; all other creatures are unaffected by the non-corporeal blade. Undead struck by the sword suffer 1d10 points of damage. In addition, if the weapon is in the hand of its owner, it gives that character a +4 saving throw bonus vs. against any undead special attacks which have saving throws.
XP Value: 1,500
GP Value: 15,000
John Bailies, Brisbane League of Adventures

Staff of Conjuration: This magical quarterstaff is a +3 weapon. Carvings depicting animals, flying creatures, humanoids, and monsters of all sorts cover its complete length. Any conjurer (specialist wizard) can use the special powers of the staff:

- The staff can use up to seven charges per day to cast *monster summoning* spells. *Monster summoning I* costs one charge and greater spells cost additional charges according to their power; *monster summoning VII* costs seven charges. The staff cancels all *protection from evil/good* spells in a 30' radius making it possible for the conjured creatures to attack.
- Once a day, the conjurer can cause four black tentacles to grow from his sides. Each tentacle is AC 4, 15 feet long, and has 20 hit points. The tentacles attack with a THAC0 of 15. A hit inflicts 1d6 points of damage and the tentacle wraps around the target. On each round after the first, the victim takes 2d6 points constriction damage and must make a saving throw vs. spells each round or lose one point of strength. A creature can escape by making a successful open doors roll. This power drains three charges.

Only 10 of these staves are known to exist.
XP Value: 12,000
GP Value: 60,000
James B. Alan, The Club

Sword of the Arvoreen: The nine known *swords of the Arvoreen* were forged eons ago by dwarven smiths and enchanted by powerful halfling priests of Arvoreen the Defender. The short swords were crafted in a time when the world was in chaos and many halfling villages were threatened by invaders. In the hands of someone other than a halfling, the swords are +1. However, in the possession of a halfling, the swords have the following powers:

- +1 vs. all creatures, +2 vs. evil creatures, +4 vs. evil creatures over 5' tall.
- The swords inflict triple damage when the wielder is defending his home or homeland.
- When the wielder is defending his home or homeland and chooses to parry rather than attack, the parry is always successful.

In addition, each of the nine swords has a single enemy the blade is attuned to. Any such enemy struck by the sword must save vs. death magic or die. Sages have documented that three of the swords, owned communally by halfling villages, are attuned to hill giants, trolls, and goblins, respectively. It is not known if the other six swords repeat these enemies or if they are attuned to other creatures.
XP Value: 4,000
GP Value: 20,000
Brett Bakke, Novice

Talking Skull: A talking skull looks like a small human skull carved from ivory or polished bone. When not in use, its jaws are always open as though it is waiting to feed. When activated, the skull functions as a *speak with dead* spell cast by a 12th level priest.

To use the skull, a character must place a bit of a corpse's bone (no more than one year deceased) into the skull's mouth. Once this is done, the skull chews the bone, destroying it. This process takes one round. When the skull finishes chewing, the owner can ask it up to four questions within a turn. The skull answers in the voice of the deceased. This item can be used once per day, but a specific spirit can be contacted only once a week.

If a character tries to speak with the same spirit twice within a week, the skull chews the bone, but then violently spits out bone fragments doing 2d4 points of damage (save for half damage) to anyone within a cone five feet long and five feet wide. For a week after this incident the skull will not function. This behavior also occurs if the skull is fed a bone from a corpse more than a year old or from a nonsentient (animal intelligence or less) being.

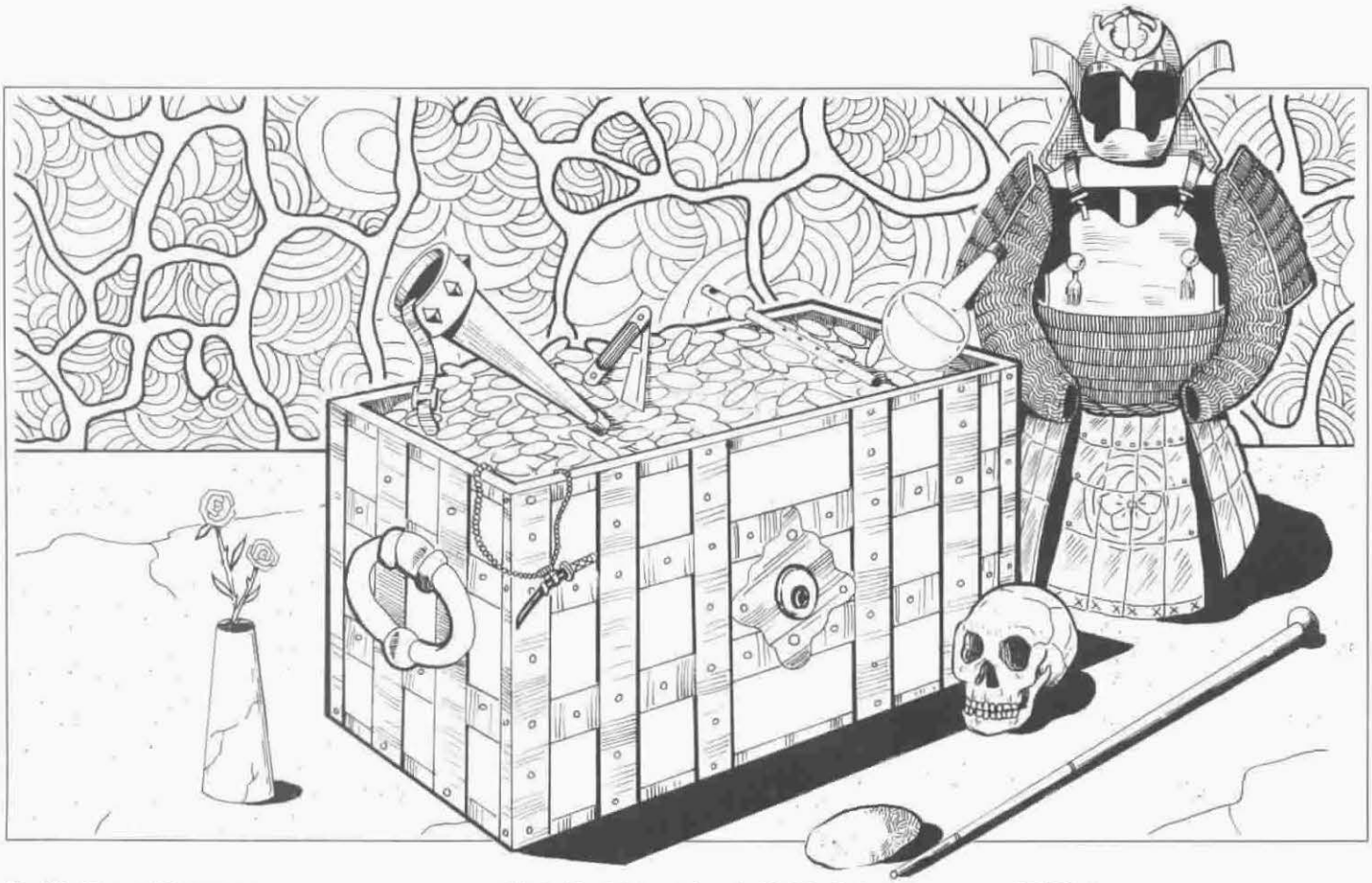
The skull radiates strong necromantic magic, but displays no alignment. It is usable only by priests.
XP Value: 1,000
GP Value: 5,000
Gary S. Watkins, Saige

Thieves' Tools of Stealth: These magical thieves' tools are a great boon to any thief or rogue. They do not appear to be made of metal, but instead appear to be constructed of a very dark, hard substance, perhaps obsidian. While they are magical, no means of detecting magic will reveal this fact. The tools confer a +10% bonus to a rogue's open locks and remove traps rolls.

The greatest power of the tools is revealed when placed inside their case, and the case is touched to the user's skin. The case magically melds into the individual's body. There the tools will safely remain, until the owner concentrates on bringing them to the surface. If a rogue is slain while the tools are melded with his skin, the tools re-emerge.
XP Value: 500
GP Value: 5,000
David W. Baker, Rathskellers

Trap-springer: This coiled steel spring is prized by adventurers. It is a precisely wound spiral of flattened wire, 6 inches in diameter and 6 inches tall. When the appropriate commands are spoken, the trap-springer performs the following services for its owner:

When the first command word is given, the device springs end over end up to 50 feet along any straight passage, counting paces aloud as it goes. When the second command is given and a racial type named (human, elf, dwarf, etc.), the trap-springer magically alters its weight to approximate an average weight for the racial type named, thus triggering any pressure plates or pit traps along its course. A third command word calls the device back to its owner. A final command word extends the trap-springer vertically or horizontally up to 50 feet, making the device rigid and allowing its owner to measure the depth, height, and/or length of any straight passage, or to utilize the coil as a ladder. The trap-springer cannot turn corners.
XP Value: 1,000
GP Value: 5,000
Susan Adams, ARC Fellowship



Troll's Bane: Many years ago, a warrior of Waterdeep was awarded an enchanted sword for helping stave off a troll raid. The warrior took his leave of the city, and rumors hint that he disappeared during a battle near Myth Drannor. Adventurers have been seeking his sword ever since.

Troll's Bane is a bastard sword with a hilt wrapped in dyed-green griffon hide. The pommel is set with a large emerald, and the blade is engraved with the words "Troll's Bane." The blade is polished to a mirror-like finish and never tarnishes. Normally, the sword is a +1 magical weapon, but when it is employed against a troll it is +4 "to hit" and damage. In addition, the blade glows when it is within 40 yards of a troll, and it emits a smoking stench when it strikes a troll. Trolls cannot regenerate damage caused by the sword.

The sword communicates telepathically, and it can cast a *heal* spell and *strength* spell once a day on its wielder.
XP Value: 2,600
GP Value: 11,000
Michael Morrow, FOG

Vladium's Fabulous Equine Brush: This magical brush is made of silver and inlaid with tortoise shell. The bristles are from the fur of a giant black ermine. Although the bristles are soft, they easily remove dirt, debris, and loose hair from any mammal with the first stroke. The great paladin Audry Vladium grew tired of the constant grooming and time involved to keep her warhorse immaculate and commissioned the creation of this item from a long-forgotten mage. There are only known to be a dozen of such brushes in existence.
XP Value: 600
GP Value: 3,000
Cheryl McNally Frech, PM Players

Wand of Arc Lightning: The wizard Tesla createded these wands. They have all the powers of normal *wands of lightning*. However, they have additional powers when used together in matching pairs. When commanded, a pair of wands generate an arc of lightning five feet wide that jumps from one wand to the other. Everything in the area of effect suffers 6d6 points of electrical damage (save vs. wand for half). One use of this feature drains two charges from the initiating wand and one from the receiving wand. The length of the arc is a minimum of two feet to a maximum of 30 feet.
XP Value: 5,000
GP Value: 40,000
David J. Radzik, The Club

Wand of Cluny: A dozen of these wands were created by the wizard "Cluney the Great." They were supposed to write his name on any surface in bright glowing letters in a color specified by him, simply by expending a charge. Unfortunately, Cluney could not spell.

The wielder of a *wand of Cluny* can write his name in colorful script on any non-magical surface by speaking a command word and expending one of the wand's charges. However, the wand will never spell the wielder's name correctly. A *wand of Cluny* is found with 20d20 charges, and the glowing script it writes lasts for 24 hours.
XP Value: 1,200
GP Value: 6,000
David McPaul, Kenneth and the Apocolypse

Wand of Feathers: These wands are approximately 18 inches long, made of rune-carved wood, and tipped with a small clump of multi-colored feathers, making them look much like feather dusters. A *wand of feathers* casts four

different spells and is usually found with 10d10 charges.

- *Gust of Wind,* two charges.
- *Tasha's Uncontrollable Hideous Laughter,* one charge.
- *Unseen Servant,* which expends one charge and lasts two hours.
- *Cantrip,* one charge.

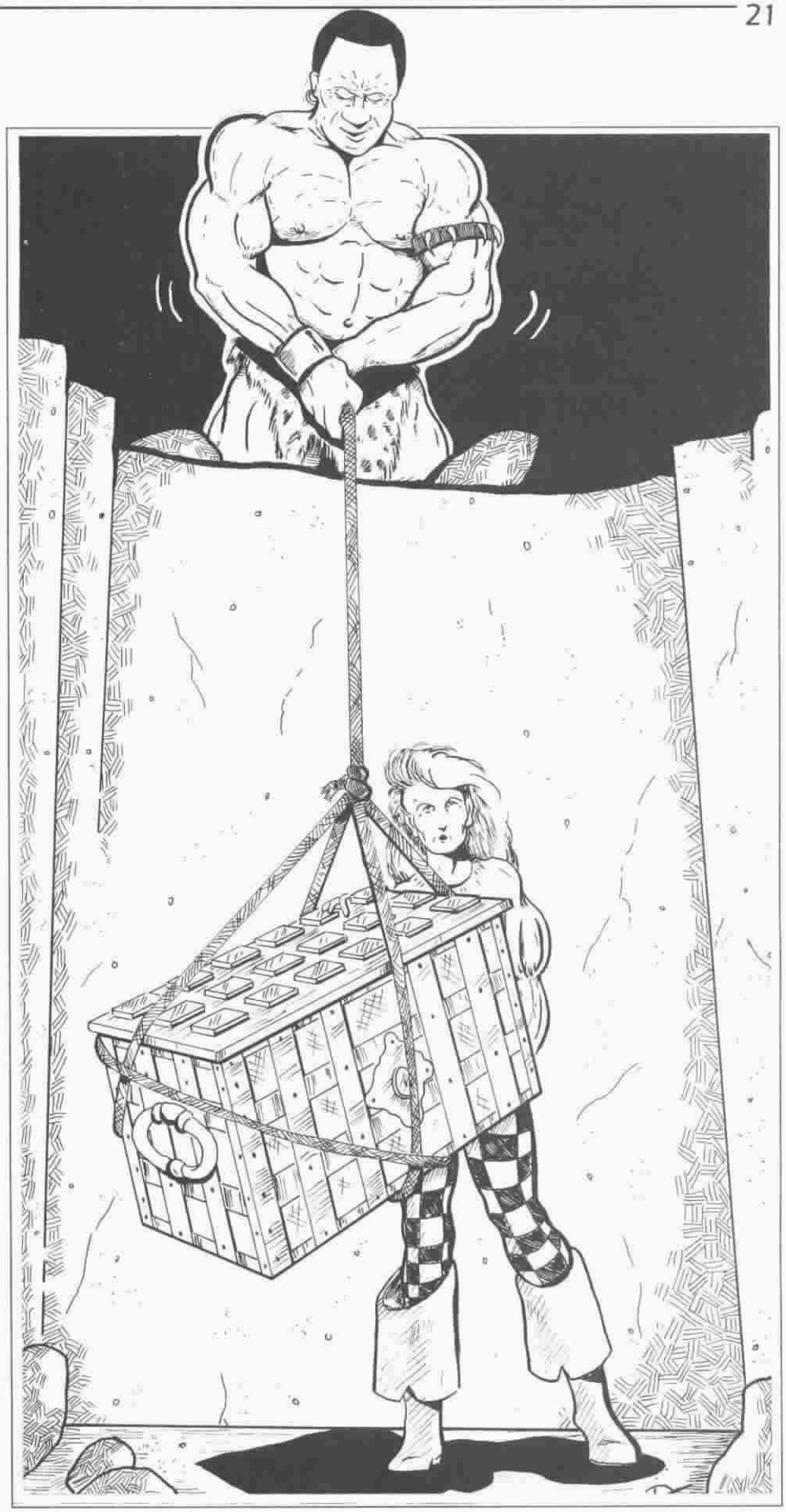
All spells are cast as if the wielder were a 6th level wizard. Anyone can use this wand.
XP Value: 3,000
GP Value: 15,000
Jim Lockhart, Novice

Weapon of Adaptation: This magic weapon, which initially appears to be a short walking stick, is prized by fighters, although it can be used by any class. When grasped and the name of a weapon spoken, such as "bardiche," the stick transforms into that weapon. The wielder can change melee weapons merely by uttering the name of a different item. *Weapons of adaptation* cannot assume the form of missile weapons or bows, nor do they grant weapon proficiencies to their wielders. The wielders suffer non-proficiency penalties if they use weapons with which they are not familiar.

All *weapons of adaptation* have magical pluses. To determine the type of *weapon of adaptation* found, consult the chart below.

Percent Roll	Bonus
01-50	+1
51-75	+2
76-90	+3
91-95	+4
96-00	Cursed, −2

XP Value: 900, 1,500, 2,100, 3,200, 0
GP Value: 5,400, 9,000, 12,600, 19,200, 1,000
Chris Ryan, Brisbane League of Adventurers



The Everwinking Eye

Secrets Of Zhentil Keep Revealed

by Ed Greenwood

"Zhentil Keep? One of the largest, proudest, and most cruel cesspools I've yet found, in several worlds."
Elminster of Shadowdale,
said to a Nimbralese merchant
Year of The Black Banner

Our ongoing tour of the Realms has taken us up the eastern shore of the Dragon Reach, and into the sparsely settled Moonsea North. Now we turn south to the sea's western end and to the mouth of the River Tesh—where the walls and spires of the widely feared city of Zhentil Keep rise against the cold north winds. Zhentil Keep appears in the *Forgotten Realms Adventures* sourcebook; the lore in this column and several that follow augments what has already appeared in print.

Zhentil Keep was the first human city to be built on the northern side of the Moonsea, and it has become the richest and most powerful habitation in the area, rivaling in power Suzail and the rich cities of Sembia. Thanks to its present rulers, the Zhentarim, Zhentil Keep has a sphere of influence that extends (by means of fear and a shadowy web of Zhentarim agents) over much of Faerun.

Zhentil Keep always has been a wealthy place where metal mined in the Moonsea North is worked into finished goods. In its early days, the city drew trade from the dwarves of the Iron House, who sent metal down the valley of the Tesh from the mines of Tethyamar. Other human settlements to the east (including Phlan, Melvaunt, and Thentia) had to fight the ogres who ruled Thar, and did not prosper so rapidly.

As man's hold on the formerly elven woodlands tightened, the Dalelands developed, and Cormyr grew in wealth and might of arms. Zhentil Keep became the northern end of an overland trade route through Teshendale, Daggerdale, Shadow Gap and the Stonelands—and became richer still.

In recent years, Zhentil Keep has grown warlike and aggressive, often attacking rival communities. The Zhentarim have come to power and coldly use magic and war to further their own ends. Their evil has made Zhentil Keep widely hated and feared across Faerun. Since the coming of the Zhentarim, Zhents have kept slaves.

Founding

Seven hundred years ago, Zhentil Keep was a mining and trading camp at the mouth of the Tesh on the north bank. It had no ruler nor permanent inhabitants. Rival caravan masters enforced their own authority with the swords of the men they commanded, and often they went down to death under the teeth and weapons of ogres, orcs, trolls, and other fearsome creatures who sought out the undefended camp in

search of easy prey.

Eventually, an enterprising ship owner of Chancelgaunt decided to build a proper dock and a stone-walled warehouse. He also raised an earthen embankment around the whole camp. This man, Orlephar Flostren, was shrewd enough to expect bandits and unscrupulous rivals to attack his new stronghold, as well as the orcs and ogres that infested the area. He hired mercenary guardsmen—not only to protect the workers who built the place (then called Flostren's Hold) but to defend the walls, police the streets, and patrol the surrounding area. Warning beacons were established to the east and north. Flostren's preparations soon proved both wise and necessary. The Hold survived several heavy orc and ogre attacks, proving its worth in its first season. The next spring, a dozen Sembian merchants offered Flostren 240,000 pieces of gold—a vast sum in the Inner Sea North in those days—for all rights to the site and the surrounding land. Flostren accepted; he died rich and happy, of natural causes, some 27 winters later, leaving the bulk of his wealth hidden somewhere in Sembia. It has never, if local lore tells the truth, been found.

The consortium set about an energetic building program. To finance it and to recoup the costs of the purchase, they sold space and dock rights to all interested merchants. There were many, thanks to tales of dwarven gold and old legends of gem-rich dragon hoards waiting in the mountains nearby. These legends had suddenly become very popular with minstrels who wandered the trade-routes (a heavy dose of Sembian gold in several bards' pockets might have had something to do with this). Merchants from virtually all of the coastal cities down the entire length of The Sea of Fallen Stars laid down their coins to do business in Flostren's Hold.

Growth

The settlement soon had a gigantic, ring-shaped, many-towered wall. A large, but plain keep was raised in the northwest quarter to house the defensive garrison. The shrewdest of the merchants, Elephstron, moved into the keep immediately, proclaiming himself Lord of the Keep. When his angry partners confronted him, he informed them that they all were Lords of the City, and he advised them to pitch in and work out some system of laws, police, and taxation if they wished to retain their newly-won nobility.

All the space within the walls was sold during the first season. Buildings grew visibly with each passing day, and Elephstron and his partners planned where and how to expand the town. Their patrols had strict orders to keep the land around the walls free of buildings and encampments lasting more than six nights. There were several nasty skirmishes between the forces of the Lords and merchants who did not like to be told how to conduct their business. To them, expanding a warehouse across a street to wall in a competitor, and similar tactics, just made good sense.

The infighting and the increasing attacks by monsters on the walls and docks, combined with rumors of the rise of an orc horde beyond Thar, convinced Elephstron that the Keep needed powerful magic to defend it. Elephstron traveled south in search of a wizard. In far-off Westgate he met a mage, one Zhentar, who impressed him and was interested in his offer on condition that he became a Lord equal to any of the Twelve, and that the city was ruled by a council of lords. The Twelve accepted Zhentar's terms.

Zhentar's land of birth and training in magecraft are unknown. It is certain that after his arrival in the Keep of the Twelve no less than six of the Lords died mysteriously, and their replacements (largely nominated by Zhentar) all seemed to know Zhentar. Except for a very rich Sembian merchant and a grim warrior-priest named Brest, all of the replacements were wizards, too.

Within a year, word spread in the Dragonreach that a new temple of Bane now existed in the Moonsea area. A man called Brest was its High Imperceptor (High Priest). A shocked Elephstron confronted Zhentar, and the mage ridiculed him, threatening him with magic. Elephstron had secrets of his own, however—magical weapons accumulated over his long merchant career—and he surprised and slew the contemptuous Zhentar, but perished himself from the dying mage's last spells. The surviving mages of the council were too impoverished and too unknown in the Keep to flout Elephstron's sons and the surviving original Lords. However, they did manage to conceal the truth about the fatal battle between Elephstron and Zhentar. They invented a tale in which Elephstron and Zhentar met their ends confronting an evil wizard and passed off the fiction as the truth. They named the still wildly expanding city "Zhentil Keep" in Zhentar's honor, and in accordance with the original notion of nobility, they acclaimed Elephstron's son Jhoaz a lord and found another wizard to assume Zhentar's lordship.

Zhentil Keep grew, and its lords had a great bridge built across the mouth of the Tesh. This linked the city with the developing farmlands and settlements of the southern Moonsea coast, and was the first step in establishing an overland trade route to Cormyr. This was important, because Hillsfar had already begun to dominate Moonsea shipping by virtue of its proximity to the River Lis. Hillsfar also had support from the elven court, which wished to limit human settlements in the Moonsea north by keeping power concentrated in the south.

The bridge was fortified, forming an outer wall for Zhentil Keep's crowded harbor. A string of adjoining shops and houses sprang up on the western side. The eastern side was taken up by the roadway and a rampart studded with guard posts equipped with catapults to repel hostile ships. The southern end of the bridge was guarded by a massive gate and tower.

Marshy ground made further expansion southward impractical; instead, a new, higher wall was begun outside the existing one. When it was complete, four winters later, the inner ring was torn down. (Thrice more, down the years, the walls have moved in this manner, until today Zhentil Keep is as large as most fortified cities in Faerun.)

The city had grown into a busy commercial center, feeding on the expanding mining trade out of the North, and supplying the growing human population of the Moonsea area with goods and services hitherto no closer than Sembia. Temples to Malar, Tempus, Tymora, and Waukeen had been founded, but the priesthood of Bane had established its dominance in the city, ruthlessly driving out priests attempting to establish places of worship for Lathander and Tyr.

Politics and War

The idea of nobility had survived the entrepreneurial rush; the sons and daughters of the original Lords (at least, those ruthless or evil enough to tolerate, and be tolerated by, Zhentar's evil

mages) had become lords and ladies. They ruled the city in an uneasy council.

One by one, the evil mages attained lichdom and retired to the depths of the Keep. Their offspring and apprentices took their places on the council.

As their undead minds deteriorated, the former masters of the city began to walk its streets by night, spying on citizens and occasionally attacking people for amusement or to gain magic or material for their insane researches—or to exact justice on those who disturbed them or worked against their descendants. These night walkers are still feared in the city, although it is likely that most have been destroyed, have become totally insane (and too preoccupied to roam) by now, have attained demi-lichdom, or have been so physically damaged as to be rendered immobile.

The rich city has always had its share of wealthy merchants; those who triumphed in the struggles of trade and came to have the leisure to resent and resist the Lords—or to seek to join their ranks.

In Zhentil Keep, several such merchants were permitted to join the ranks of the nobility, but the bulk were denied, and unrest among them grew. Meanwhile, Thar fell to humans largely based in other cities. As the Lords saw rivals and potential enemies growing more numerous, they carefully and quietly spent money to build up the city's army to awesome numbers.

Soldiers must, of course, be given something to do (besides brutally putting down unrest among the citizenry) if they are not to prove a menace to their employers. The forces of Zhentil Keep laid waste to the town of Teshwave and established rigid control of the valley of the Tesh, took and fortified the market town of Yulash, made war on Hillsfar, and established a temple to Bane in the newly-settled village of Voonlar.

At the same time, Zhentil Keep drew Phlan and Melvaunt into an alliance. Phlan had suffered several crushing military defeats at the hands of Zhentil Keep in disputes over the ownership of land lying between the two cities and was not in a position to refuse the alliance.

Zhentil Keep's rapidly-expanding navy had just undertaken a war with Mulmaster to ensure Zhentil Keep's naval supremacy over the Moonsea when disaster struck the area. Dragons swooped down in a mass raid, to plunder and destroy all the human cities of the Moonsea. What they did not topple, they set afire or twisted with spells. They feasted at will upon humans and their livestock. Zhentarim mages on the rooftops and ramparts of the city fought off the dragon attack with spells, but not before the original "keep" inside the walls had been reduced to rubble—with many cowering Lords and their families still inside it.

The dragons had been goaded into working together by orc shamans (a tactic later used by the followers of Sammaster, The Cult of the Dragon, as related in issue #110 of DRAGON® Magazine and in the original Realms boxed Campaign Set). In the dragons' wake, a vast horde of orcs swept down out of the little-known North, led by the gigantic four-armed orc Ghauust "Chosen of Bahgtru."

The dragons destroyed Hulburg, and Sulyaspryn was shattered; orcs swept over the ruins and butchered the survivors. The horde beset all human settlements north of the Moonsea.

The Lords of Zhentil Keep were shrewd enough to see that they could redeem themselves in the eyes of many neighbors who might otherwise unite against them by aiding Melvaunt and Thentia in the struggle—and also impress those who might otherwise consider Zhentil Keep militarily weak (such as Cormyr, busily expanding northward; and Sembia, whose ship captains had taken to pointedly reminding Zhents that they were Sembian in origin, and ought to be allies of, or even citizens of, Sembia). So the Zhentilar armies were hurled into the fray, bolstered by the Art wielded by the lords who were also mages, and by the city's temple of Bane. The horde was defeated.

No sooner were the battles ended when ogres fell on the weakened human kingdom of Thar and smashed it, regaining their traditional lands and threatening the survival of the weary Moonsea cities.

The astute Lords Halastar and Aumraeven of Zhentil Keep (the former a great warrior, the latter a fell mage) called the rulers of other Moonsea cities to a parley in neutral Elmwood, and there convinced all that The Citadel of the Raven (a former bandit hold) be refortified by all human powers in the region acting together.

As a goodwill gesture, Zhentil Keep withdrew its troops from Yulash and gave it independence, sending the Zhentilar garrison north to the Citadel. (Covert agents of the Lords ensured that Yulash would act as Zhentil Keep desired until Zhentilar armies retook it.)

In our next column, we'll hear more of the fate of The Citadel of the Raven, and the unfolding history of proud Zhentil Keep.

This Just In

Tournament results for the following conventions were recorded at HQ between January 16th, and February 1st, 1993:

WINTER FANTASY™ convention
Condeminimum
Contrary

If you played a Network event at a convention not on this list, check with the organizers to see if the results have been sent to HQ.

Note that conventions run in **Europe** and **Australia** do not appear on this list.

The Living Galaxy

A Stellar Game Master Is Made, Not Born

by Roger E. Moore

This past fall, TSR game designer David "Zeb" Cook and I gave a seminar for gamers at the ICON 17 convention in Iowa City. Our topic was how to be a more effective and creative game master, and we spent an hour discussing both practical and off-the-wall techniques for GMs to use in keeping their games fresh and exciting—keeping their players happy as a result.

In this column, we'll look at some of those techniques. Be warned: Becoming a good GM, especially for science fiction role playing campaigns, takes both time and work. You'll get out of it what you put into it. Game mastering is done for fun, but it pays off in a big way when you do it well. You and your players will reap the benefits for many sessions to come.

Read, Read, Read

The first step in becoming a good GM is to read. Read a *lot.* Read newspapers, news and science magazines, science fiction, fantasy, history, gaming supplements, encyclopedia entries, novels, short-story anthologies, old books, new books, paperbacks, hardbounds, the works. Just read, read, read.

The more you read, the greater the wealth of ideas and information you have to draw from when you are the game master. Because science fiction games are more dependent on real-world science than perhaps any other game (with the exception of espionage and military role playing simulations), you should stay up with current events in the sciences and apply them to your game whenever you can. (See this column in issue #79 for more on this topic.)

You might catch and correct scientific and technical flaws in your own role playing game. Space elevators, for example, can be grounded only along the equator of a world, but one recent science fiction role playing game placed one planet's space elevator some distance north of the equator—an embarrassing and troublesome mistake. Perhaps your game has the wrong value for lunar gravity, completely ignores the use of cybernetic implants, or fails to note that objects near a world's L4 or L5 Lagrange points actually *revolve around* those points—not staying still at them. With time and patience, you can add the missing and incorrect parts, making your game all the more realistic and enjoyable for the players.

Find New Resources

Always look for new sources of ideas. If you subscribe to GEnie, CompuServe, or other on-line information services, check their astronomy, space exploration, and science fiction forums and message bases. Thumb through your *TV Guide* for programs of special interest, like an episode of *Nova* on space travel or a rerun of a *Star Trek* episode the plot of which you might want to duplicate later in your campaign. Rent action-adventure, science fiction, fantasy, or war movie videos. Most of all, just keep your eyes open for new situations and new ideas.

Did the evening news have an interesting story about the problems of everyday life in Moscow? Use some of that for a scenario set on a world with similar problems. Did you have to do a report on Pompeii and Mt. Vesuvius for your humanities class in school? Borrow the same information for your time-travel role playing game. Did you see the movies *Patriot Games* or *Sneakers?* Adapt the plots for your futuristic espionage scenario. The richest resource of all is the real world.

Write It Down

You may know of several friends who always complain that they have great ideas but can't get around to doing anything with them. The first step in doing something with those ideas is to simply *write them down.* Keep a notebook devoted to nothing but your game-mastering ideas. This notebook should be separate from any that contain basic information on your current campaign, as it will be full of "maybe" material, not definite stuff. The moment a new idea strikes you ("What if the adventurers found a black monolith in a jungle, and it was an ancient high-tech teleporter or something. . . ."), write it down. Keep adding and elaborating upon your ideas, finding ways to combine them and create something new.

My own notebook, for instance, has pages devoted to things like starship and NPC names, interesting books I've read, new kinds of aliens, ideas for one-evening adventures, offbeat adventure ideas, problems I've had as a GM (and how I fixed them), things to stick in an all-terrain vehicle, and encounters a group might have traveling overland across an airless world like the Moon. The contents of your notebook can be as eclectic and bizarre as you like.

File It Away

Get a bunch of file folders and a file box or filing cabinet (even a plastic storage crate will do). Label the files with topics important to your science fiction campaign—Mars, the Chinese space program, early European settlements in America, supernovas, whatever. Whenever you find a newspaper or magazine article on one of these topics, clip it out or photocopy it, then drop it into the appropriate file. Write down the publication and page number you got it from, too, with the date if it came from a periodical; this helps if you have to look up the material again. Within a few weeks, you'll have quite a collection of new ideas for your campaign.

I have a similar filing system that I use for my writing, with files devoted to topics that I want to cover in future columns. One thing I've learned to do is to keep 3" × 5" index cards with the filing box. If I think of an interesting idea or resource for a particular topic, I jot it down and drop the card into the right file.

This filing system can also include files for particular worlds in an interstellar campaign, so you can add pictures from magazines that might be appropriate to that world (ocean views and islands for a water-covered world, for example) and articles on real-world places, people, and items that might be found on those worlds. A file on a world settled by Japanese colonists might

include notes on Japanese words and phrases of importance, pictures of Japanese people and their architecture, and whatever else you find useful. Maybe they have their own martial-arts schools—you could add clippings on aikido and karate.

Place the Face

Speaking of people, clip out lots of photos of faces—every kind of face. If you can get hold of an unwanted pile of magazines (*Newsweek, National Geographic, Time, Life, Cosmopolitan, New Woman, Sassy,* anything at all), cut out as many interesting and unusual faces as you can find. Use these in your adventures to show what a particular NPC looks like. The master villain's looks can be summed up in one second by holding up the appropriate picture, and you'll be able to attach pictures to all your major NPCs. Get as broad a racial, ethnic, and cultural variety as you can. Using photos like these really brings the adventure home to the players. Let your players use similar photos for their own characters, too.

Grab Those Maps

One thing many GMs complain about in any game system is a lack of floor plans, city-street maps, countryside maps, etc. What does the inside of a normal office building look like? A small town in Nebraska? A shopping mall? A military command center? An American space shuttle? A lunar impact crater?

You can solve this problem by looking for and collecting or clipping out maps and layouts. If you see an interesting home in an architectural journal or even *Better Homes & Gardens,* cut it out and drop it into a special file of such things. Collect maps from other game systems if they look like they'll be useful to you. A three-dimensional cutaway view of a temple from TSR's vast DRAGONLANCE® saga can become an elaborate but primitive palace on a low-tech world, with the map re-keyed by you to include whatever you want it to contain. Photocopy starship plans from other games and dump them into their own file. Make files for maps of jungle camps, frontier towns in the Old West, and space launching facilities. You'll never lack for maps of anything again.

Make Computers Do It

Why should you spend three nights in a row rolling dice to generate all the NPCs, worlds, and random encounters your group of heroes might meet on their way across the galaxy? Isn't that boring? Why not make your computer do it?

If you have some programming talent and have access to a good home personal computer (or can sneak time on one elsewhere), make up some programs to generate all the major encounters your player characters might have. For example, design some wilderness encounter tables for the different regions of a colony world, making them as complex as possible, then let the computer drop a printout of the first 100 things the group will meet in each area.

Non-player characters can be detailed down to their game statistics, possessions, weapons, wealth, armor, clothing, physical appearance, handicaps and odd features, psionic/magical powers, group affiliations (religions, ethnic group, political parties, etc.), and even names, personalities, morals, goals, attitudes, and reactions to the player characters. You can have the computer detail vehicles of every sort—starships, unmanned spacecraft, all-terrain vehicles, ships, submarines, and aircraft—with full notes on their crews, cargos, and distinguishing features. NPC military and civilian convoys can be set up. Wild animals can be fleshed out, and natural events (weather conditions or disasters) can be predicted with accuracy for any campaign setting. Treasure hoards can be knocked out to the last paper credit.

More complex programs might even map out random caverns, dungeons, ruins, small towns, buildings, wilderness terrain, and what have you, using more-complex versions of the random dungeon and wilderness terrain tables in the appendices of the original AD&D® game *Dungeon Masters Guide.* If you are setting up a brand new section of space for your campaign, you can even detail whole worlds and solar systems with the right program.

Having a random assortment of encounters and locations can be invigorating for you as a GM. The material will be completely original, and you'll be able to do anything you want to with it.

One Size Fits All

At the opposite end of the scale, you can quickly generate standardized game statistics for NPCs that are encountered in large quantities, when you don't have the time or feel the need to create highly individual notes for each during a confrontation or battle. Examples here are groups of animals, members of a mob, or small military or police units with vehicles and gear. Any sort of gaming shorthand you can use to plow through encounters here will speed the playing of the encounter to your group's satisfaction. If you intend to make an NPC or monster particularly memorable, by all means create specific statistics for it; otherwise—not!

Beyond that, you might not even need to create any statistics for characters or creatures that are not expected to become involved in combat with the PCs. Pets, timid herbivores, merchants, businessmen, plants, bugs, and passive sentients-on-the-street might be included. The two lessons here are: 1) Write down only what you need in play; and 2) If you can get by without game statistics, don't roll them up. Save your time for more important things, like building an interesting universe.

Dry-Run Rules

Years ago, some friends and I were looking over the psionics rules for the original AD&D game and trying to make heads and tails of them. Finally we decided to simply roll up some psionic characters and play out the rules in a short campaign. Doing this cleared up many of our questions, and afterward we knew how to handle this admittedly messy part of the old game system.

There is every reason to try this same tactic in your game system if there is a rules section that you or your players are not able to figure out. (It is unfortunate, but some games on the market today are not very user friendly, thanks to poor editing and a lack of clarity.) In your role as the GM, simply set up a short, one-evening game in which those rules get a workout with all players involved. If you're testing combat or psionics/magic rules, have everyone create a character to test those rules. I would skip the rules on character generation for a dry run, because the players will usually develop characters that stretch the rules to their limits—and the

limits of the system are what you want to discover.

If you're testing unarmed combat rules, you can run a bar fight (an old favorite). Try a commando raid for weapons testing. With psionics or magical systems, allow all the characters to use those powers. If you're learning starship combat, you can give away battle cruisers to players on a whim. All that matters is learning the rules. None of the events or characters in a dry run should actually be considered part of the regular campaign, of course, so armies and planets can be destroyed as often as you like. If you absolutely must put the dry run into your campaign context, call it a military simulation run by a war college somewhere, a sort of "what if?" scenario ("What if our homeworld was attacked by an Imperial Strike Force?"). The American military does this all of the time, imagining invasions of Florida, Texas, and so on.

Dry runs can be rather free-form, and they can be a lot of fun, too. You may wish to consider using a dry run to break up your regular campaign with fresh material (see "Change of Pace").

Propping It Up

I was part of a *Traveller* campaign once that used the *Leviathan* supplement, a booklet describing a large merchant starship that the characters used to explore new markets, seek out new imports and exports, and boldly go where no entrepreneur had gone before. I had the idea of drawing out the deck plans for the ship in 15-mm scale for use with cardboard figures, and the results were dramatic—suddenly everyone was excited about the campaign to a degree they hadn't been before, thanks to a simple prop.

In the realm of gaming props, there are, of course, miniatures and three-dimensional accessories such as walls, trees, furniture, model spacecraft, etc. Miniatures are a powerful prop, though science fiction figures are not as commonly seen as fantasy ones (still, even fantasy ones can be used for low-tech worlds, strange cults, bizarre aliens, etc.). True, lead figures can be expensive, but cardboard counters can be used just as well.

Acting It Out

There are also other props, such as low-key costumes for the GM (a change of hats, a cape, a different shirt, etc.). A GM can easily set a mood for an adventure by changing her appearance, speech, and posture to match that of an NPC—wearing a cape and cowl for a mysterious old woman met in a starport bar, sitting up primly to imitate a city councilman, speaking with a British or German accent as does the colonist to whom the heroes are speaking, etc. You can even play with the gaming environment by adjusting the lighting and room temperature, even adding music appropriate to the scenario, but avoid overdoing it to the point where the players are uncomfortable.

If you want to try this, read the article, "Propping Up Your Campaign," from DRAGON® Magazine issue #176. It contains loads of helpful information on adding dramatic flair to your game mastering.

Handouts Galore

Handouts are an especially nice sort of prop. A good GM can come up with handouts giving certain players knowledge of things only their characters would know, such as special rumors, inside information, major news, world-statistic updates, library data, new discoveries, upcoming events, safety warnings, classified ads for help wanted, police APBs and "most-wanted" lists, and more. In a fantasy campaign I once ran, based in a large city, I had rumor sheets that doubled as sparks for adventures ("Let's go there and see that! Let's find out about that!"). Handouts can include vehicle- and NPC-statistic sheets; maps, photos, and texts found during investigations (Chaosium's *Call of Cthulhu* game does this part superbly); and government documents that the players must fill out for their characters (GDW's *Traveller* game had so many forms for players to fill out that it was effectively the first role playing game to come with its own bureaucratic red tape).

Carefully used, handouts deepen the players' understanding of the universe you are running and tighten up its "reality" by offering a detailed and consistent picture of the future. Draw them out on your computer, pass them out, and watch the results. Avoid overdoing this so that players aren't swamped with data, but never be afraid to use them at all.

Let Players Help Out

If you're feeling the strain of coming up with a new plot every week, then try something simple: Ask your players what kind of adventures *they* want to have. Have them suggest new directions for the game, then give them a try (without handing the players everything their characters could ask for, of course).

Players can furthermore help create part of the universe. If they want to detail their characters' hometowns, let them do so within reason. Use this material for sparking more adventures if the PCs have to go home to help their families, as is done in the old boxed set for GDW's *Traveller* game, *Tarsus*.

Players who are not directly involved in the campaign can also help by running certain NPCs (not the main villains, but lots of other lowlifes and regular folks). A player can be far more devious in fighting his own group than the GM might ever be. Give it a try; if Susan's normal character is unavailable one evening; let her play an NPC sniper firing on the group and see if she gets into the role more than the other players like!

Rotate The GM

Why not have more than one person be the GM for a particular campaign setting, one GM at a time? In an interstellar game this can be ideal, with some of the planets in a small sector of space divided up among the willing participants for further detailing and adventure-making. The group then travels from one world to another, in part depending on who's running the game that evening and has an adventure ready. This set-up is great if you have several good player/GMs with creative ideas on world-building. Obviously, some planets and GMs will be more popular than others, but a good balance is usually struck, and the main GM (if any) gets to rest and play sometimes, too.

On one-world adventures with numerous nations or small colonies, the prospective GMs can divide up the world as they like, each taking different nations, cities, cultures, aliens, etc. In some circumstances, different GMs can run different groups of space adventurers, though this can get too complicated with three or more groups running

around the universe. Try to stick with one group of heroes at a time. Different GMs can also run different games, as per the note on "Change of Pace" that follows.

Change Of Pace

Even exploring the universe can get a little old. Once a major adventure has been completed, offer the group a chance to try something different, like an entirely new sort of game. Another gamer could become the GM and give you a much-needed break, or you could run the game and stretch your mental muscles.

If you try an alternate campaign as a change of pace, pick one with a really unusual premise. There are lots of fantasy games, yes, but look at those role playing games with modern and science fiction elements. There's Chaosium's *Call of Cthulhu* system and GDW's *Dark Conspiracy* game for horror, GDW's *Twilight: 2000* for near-future warfare and survival, and any number of super-hero games. Look also at games with oddball starting scenarios:

—TimeLine's *Morrow Project* game, in which you are part of a secret government project and wake up in a post-atomic world that you must tame;

—Tri Tac's *Incursion* rules, in which you are a modern human, kidnapped by alien slavers, who must fight his way to freedom and warn Earth; or

—The *Hunter Planet* game (produced by an Australian company also named Hunter Planet), in which you are an alien tourist who has come to Earth to bag big game: humans! (This is obviously a humorous set-up, and it received a favorable review in DRAGON issue #140, on page 88.)

You can even try mini-campaigns in your regular game. For instance, have your players generate barbarian characters on some hopelessly low-tech planet, then have them encounter a surveying starship that landed in their territory.

Whatever you do, design the campaign to be short, lasting only two or three sessions at most. Then pick up with the regular campaign and head off into space with it, refreshed and ready.

Look For More Tips

There are lots of other articles in gaming magazines on how to become a more effective and creative GM. Some of these were written for non-science fiction game systems, but if you have any wit at all you can adapt the advice to your game with ease. You may even want to photocopy some of these articles for your own use, putting them in a special three-ring binder for reference. Some articles of interest include these from DRAGON Magazine over the last year and a half:

—Issue #188, "Be Nice to Your Referee," "Roles For Role-Players," and "That's 'Role,' Not 'Roll'!": These three lead articles have excellent advice for easing the GM's burden during any role playing game, as well as offering advice for the players on how to help out during a game.

—Issue #187, "Troubleshooting Your Game": This details constructive ways to handle disruptive players and infighting in your gaming group.

—Issue #186, "Mission: Impossibly Dangerous": This offers lots of adventure hooks for GDW's *Dark Conspiracy* game, but these clever plots will fit nearly any science fiction campaign.

—Issue #186, "Give Your Villains a Fighting Chance" and "The Game Wizards: Bill's Guide to Villainy Unbounded": Both of these pieces, with some interpolation from the AD&D game, offer helpful hints to GMs when creating really nasty foes for PCs to meet across the galaxy.

—Issue #184, "Really Good Bad Guys" and " 'You *Again!*' ": Here are two more articles on making fantasy-game villains tougher to beat, with lots of tips for science fiction game players.

—Issue #184, "The Referee's Code of Honor": Six basic ways to earn your players' trust in a role playing game are described in depth, with examples that can be applied to any game.

—Issue #184, "Audible Glamour—Not Clamor": If you want to be a good GM, you have to be a good speaker. This article goes into detail on how to describe settings and action effectively in your game.

—Issue #182, "Psionics—In Living Color!": Another article on improving your word power, this one tackles ways of creating imagery for the use of psionic powers. Though it's for the AD&D® game, you can adapt this easily to psionics used in science fiction games.

—Issue #180, "The Wanderers": If you have to create random-encounter tables for your wilderness worlds, check out this system for creating logical, easy-to-use tables.

—Issue #177, "Secrets of the Masters Revealed!": This excellent article provided some of the basis for this one. A fiction writer here offers lots of ways in which you can pump up your campaign and really make it shine.

—Issue #176, "Propping Up Your Campaign": Oddball "tools" for game mastering are described by the score in this fascinating work (mentioned earlier) on new ways to get your players in the mood for role playing. This material works best with modern-era and near-future games, but it can be applied to any game.

—Issue #175, "Inventing the 'Instant' Adventure": If you prepare for it, you can wing a scenario with the best of them. This excellent piece, originally done for fantasy games, comes with 24 hot-wired scenarios, some of which you can adapt to science fiction games.

—Issue #174, "Defeating More With Less": Another fantasy-game article, this one covers ways to make weak monsters very dangerous with the use of clever tactics and traps. One can only imagine what a clever GM will do with this one the next time the PCs land on a world full of gremlin-like aliens.

That will do for now. I have even more GM tips and tricks, but I'll save these for a later issue. If you're looking for more ideas, remember that other columns have dropped lots of ideas in past issues of POLYHEDRON® Newszine (for instance, check out the super-hero advice column, "With Great Power," or borrow plot ideas from the movie reviews in "Into the Dark"). Find the best advice you can, copy it, study it, and put it to good use. With some effort and time, you can become the GM of your players' dreams—not their nightmares. Bring your galaxy to life, and have fun.

Into The Dark

What's Up, Doc?

James Lowder

Doctors—both MDs and PhDs—are stereotypically depicted in fantasy, SF, and horror films as either heroic saviors of humankind or whacked-out monomaniacs intent on some crazed project or another. This project could be an intricate and bloody plot for revenge—as in the Dr. Phibes flicks—or an unbelievable experiment that will one day conquer death or uncover a way to stop telemarketers from calling during the best part of a really good video. Do they try to hawk aluminum siding during *Doctor Death, Seeker of Souls?* Of course not. But the phone just rings off the hook when I try to watch *Seven Samurai* or *Clockwork Orange* or *Valley of Gwangi*....

Anyway, what scripters seem to realize is that knowledge grants power, a fact that makes doctor-types ideal to either save the world or destroy it. Moreover, the most brilliant of these learned men—and the most interesting characters—are difficult to categorize as either heroes or villains. They know so much more about the world than the average dope that they play by different rules. Anthony Hopkins's portrayal of Dr. Van Helsing in *Bram Stoker's Dracula* is a great example of this, but there are hundreds like it.

This column and one following will delve into the world of psychotic PhDs and lunatic medicos, with films that sport a doctor as the title character. No Frankensteins need apply.

You can't get any better *****
Entertaining and enjoyable ****
There are worse films ***
Wait for cable **
A waste of good tape *

Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde

1932, 98 Minutes
Paramount
Director: Rouben Mamoulian
Cast: Fredric March, Mariam Hopkins, Rose Hobart
*****

Robert Louis Stevenson's celebrated 1886 novel, *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, is a chilling allegory about the duel nature of man, stating bluntly that even the most angelic of us has a base, evil side driven by profane desires. Supposedly, the novel's first draft was completed in only three days, burned because of critical failings, then rewritten in three more. And despite the story's success, Stevenson claimed toward the end of his life that it was the worst thing he'd ever written.

The huge number of films devoted to this classic tells us history has decided in the story's favor. The first three decades of the century saw many adaptations of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* come to the screen, three in 1920 alone. In 1932, Fredric March took on the role of Henry Jekyll and gave an amazingly adept performance, undoubtedly worthy of the Oscar it earned him.

Dr. Henry Jekyll, surgeon and philosopher, seeks to separate the duel natures of man, freeing his divine spirit from his baser instincts. He creates an elixir intended to do just that, but drinking it merely allows his more animalistic self to possess him completely—and thus is born the brutal Mr. Hyde. Whereas Jekyll is constrained by the expectations of society, especially the demands of his fiance's stiff, military-type father, Hyde can do as he pleases, frequenting taverns and consorting with women of decidedly questionable virtue.

The more Jekyll tries to control Hyde, the more power the brutal beast gains, eventually possessing the good doctor without the use of the elixir. And caught up in Jekyll's express trip to damnation are two women. Muriel (Rose Hobart), the doctor's fiance, is caring and supportive, though she cannot fathom why her beloved disappears for days at a time or why he misses their engagement parties, publically humiliating her. Ivy (Mariam Hopkins) is a prostitute Jekyll once saved from being beaten, but who Hyde makes his unwilling lover, terrorizing her into submission.

March's performance as Jekyll is astounding, just the right mix of intense man of science and cultured, love-struck suitor. His Hyde is grotesque, more simian that human, and possessed of a cunning that shows every time he flashes his twisted, rotting teeth. Even without today's high-tech make-up and lighting, March convinces us that the elixir has transformed him completely from an angel to a devil.

Everything else about the film supports this grand performance. Ivy's scenes with Hyde are absolutely terrifying; the fear she shows at the beast's entrance conjures images of tortures far worse than the filmmakers could have shown. The sequence where she pleads with Jekyll to keep Hyde away from her, not knowing of course that they are one in the same, is simply stunning.

Throughout, director Mamoulian makes it clear to the audience that *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* is an allegory, that the good doctor is nothing more or less than a representation of all people. The radical camerawork in the film's first five minutes should make this obvious enough; we see the opening shots only from Jekyll's point of view. The close of the film is equally blunt. When Doctor Lanyon levels an accusing finger, identifying the murderer, he points directly at the audience. Like Jekyll, we are guilty of baser instincts, too.

Dr. Jekyll and Sister Hyde

1971, 97 Minutes
Hammer/AIP
Director: Roy Ward Baker
Cast: Ralph Bates, Martine Beswick
***

The title says it all in this somewhat interesting twist on the Stevenson story. As Dr. Jekyll, Ralph Bates hunts for an antivirus to cure all the diseases plaguing mankind. When he realizes he cannot possibly live long enough to perfect it, he creates an *elixir vitae* to extend his life. The magical drink is made largely from female hormones, however, and it has a decidedly unusual effect on him. His alter-ego is beautiful Martine Beswick, who stalks the alleys of Whitechapel, looking for young women to sustain Jekyll's experiments.

The script by Brian Clemens, (sometimes scribe of TV's *Avengers* series and writer/director of *Captain Kronos*) mixes together all sorts of Victorian horror staples. Not only do we get Dr. Jekyll, but Jack the Ripper and body snatchers Burke and Hare, as well. Like most of

Clemens's work, the film doesn't take itself too seriously, but many times it wanders too far into the realm of self-parody. Double entendres abound in the dialogue, most of them real groaners about Jekyll "not being the man he used to be."

The gimmicky story just won't sustain your interest for 97 minutes, especially after the third or fourth sequence of Jekyll/Hyde skulking through fog-shrouded London streets. *Dr. Jekyll and Sister Hyde* is only one of a long, long string of horror flicks trying to put a new spin on the Stevenson yarn. Let's see. There's *Dr. Black and Mr. Hyde, Dr. Heckyl and Mr. Hype, Dr. Jekyll's Dungeon of Death....*

The Doctor and the Devils

1985, 93 Minutes
Fox
Director: Freddie Francis
Cast: Jonathan Pryce, Timothy Dalton, Stephen Rea, Twiggy
*****1/2**

In a very grimy Victorian England, Dr. Thomas Rock (Timothy Dalton) battles against narrow-minded colleagues in teaching anatomy at a medical college. His fellow instructors cannot see past the societal mores that mark corpses sacred, so Rock must turn to body snatchers Fallon (Jonathan Pryce) and Broom (Stephen Rea) for suitable dissection candidates.

Like the standard Jekyll and Hyde stories, *The Doctor and the Devils* centers on the clash between Dr. Rock's high aspirations and the corruptibility of his human nature. Rock begins the story fighting to prevent needless suffering, but in paying Fallon and Broom for corpses, he instigates them into murdering people when no fresh bodies are to be had.

The problem with *The Doctor and the Devils* is the scattered storyline. Adapted from a Dylan Thomas screenplay written in the 1940s, the script wanders from character to character, giving too much time to minor players and not enough to Rock or the body snatchers. Hammer veteran Freddie Francis, never one for thrilling camerawork, lets the story unfold at a leisurely pace, compounding the script's lack of focus.

Fortunately, the cast rallies nicely to make the movie somewhat interesting. Timothy Dalton lends Rock an air of learned intensity, while allowing him to be polished and dashing. Jonathan Pryce steals the film as the crazed Fallon, who even frightens his partner-in-crime by the end of the film. Watch for other familiar faces, including Patrick Stewart as Dr. Macklin, Rock's chief rival at the medical college.

Doctor Mordrid

1992, 75 Minutes
Full Moon
Director: Charles Band and Albert Band
Cast: Jeffrey Combs, Yvette Nipar, Brian Thompson
****

Jeffrey Combs shows up in a lot of stinkers, but he always seems to rise above the mire and even add a bit of originality to otherwise hackneyed low-budget flicks. In good productions like *Re-Animator* or *From Beyond,* he really shines. In absolute howlers like *Cellar Dweller* or the latest version of *Pit and the Pendulum,* his bit parts make you just a little less angry that you shelled out a couple of bucks to rent such a dog.

Doctor Mordrid is sort of middle ground in the Jeffrey Combs library. It lacks a good script and suffers from some atrocious holes in its plot, but the story also makes a lot more sense than, say, *Highlander 2.* Combs handles the lead with his usual flair, proving he's adept at creating good guys, too.

Combs plays Dr. Anton Mordrid, a powerful sorcerer from the 4th Dimension assigned to protect Earth from Kabal (Brian Thompson), a fellow sorcerer without such a sunny disposition. From his very spacious New York City apartment, Mordrid keeps watch on the world. (Someone at Full Moon obviously reads *Dr Strange.*) While he cools his heels, he gets involved with a neighbor, Samantha (Yvette Nipar), who happens to be a police researcher for an occult crimes squad. Can you see a romantic buddy plot developing? Go to the head of the class if you nodded.

The special effects are pretty good, the highlight being the dinosaur and mastodon skeletons the dueling sorcerers bring to life. Apart from Combs and Nipar, though, the performances range from lackluster to painful to watch. This is, at least in part, the fault of the filmmakers; the brain-dead thug Kabal enlists as a minion seems to have only one real purpose—to swear enough for *Dr. Mordrid* to get an R rating for pay-per-view showings. The movie never made it to the big screen, thus bringing in the gore film crowd familiar with Combs as Herbert West, Re-Animator.

The Band Brothers rushed the film through the final battle and blew through the resolution to the romance subplot. For those of you left hungry for more, don't despair. Full Moon often plans ahead for quickie sequels, and the loose plot threads left dangling at the end of *Doctor Mordrid* indicate they've already got something cooked up for this series, too. If Jeffrey Combs stars again, I'll watch it.

Doctor Death, Seeker of Souls

1973, 90 Minutes
Freedom Arts/Cinerama
Director: Eddie Saeta
Cast: John Considine, Barry Coe, Cheryl Miller, Moe Howard
1/2

The only reason to watch this miserably dull film is to see Moe Howard in a horror movie. Actually, the head Stooge plays a bit part in this dreary flick; only rabid fans should bother.

When his wife dies, Fred (Barry Coe) just can't get over it. He's certain she's going to come back to him. He frequents mystics, searching for a way to contact her, but all of them turn out to be con artists or lunatics (like the roomful of robed monks praying to a bare light-bulb). Only Dr. Death (John Considine) has the answers Fred seeks.

Dr. Death has conquered mortality, having long ago discovered a way for his soul to pass to a new body when the old one dies. Now, with his brutish manservant Thor, he runs a resurrection service. For a fee, you get a new body. Fred, unsurprisingly, decides to buy one for his wife's spirit.

But wait! No one told Fred this was going to involve murder! And when he tries to back out of the deal, Dr. Death won't let him. Actually, Death doesn't care about Fred, but he's such an inveterate lecher he can't pass up the opportunity to bring a beautiful woman back from the dead so she can "thank" him properly.

Don't be fooled if this sounds the least bit interesting. *Doctor Death* drones on and on, throbbing like a dull toothache that won't go away. So unless you live and die for the Stooges, steer well clear of this one. And even if you do rent it for Moe, keep the fast-forward button warmed up. You'll need it.